10¢
DIME
ALL STORIES COMPLETE
OCTOBER
WESTERN MAGAZINE
THE RAW, RED TRAIL TO DODGE!
DRAMATIC EPIC NOVEL OF THE THUNDERING HERDS
by WALT COBURN
A CLANSMAN BRINGS HIS OWN WAR
by CLIFF FARRELL
OLMSTED
CODY
PEARSOL
THE LEADING WESTERN MAGAZINE

We Challenge America *with these*

4 GREAT JEWELRY VALUES!

HERE they are! Selected by our experts as the four most outstanding jewelry values in America! Read the descriptions carefully — study the illustrations — then **send** for your choice TODAY on FREE TRIAL! See for **yourself** why ROYAL — **"America's Largest Mail Order Credit Jewelers"** — features these four magnificent values with fullest confidence. If convinced, pay on ROYAL'S **Liberal Terms.**

Less than 10c a day

payable in 10 easy monthly payments. Send $1.00 deposit NOW and a few personal facts about yourself — age, occupation, etc. Your dealings will be STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. No red tape — no direct inquiry — NO C.O.D. TO PAY on arrival.

10 MONTHS TO PAY!

We ship promptly for your examination and TEN DAYS FREE TRIAL. If displeased in any way, return your selection and we promptly refund your deposit. If fully satisfied simply pay only the small amount stated each month.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED — Every ring or watch carries ROYAL'S written guarantee backed by 41 years of fair and square dealings.

6 Genuine Diamonds

$37.50 Value Now Only $29.75

BOTH RINGS

Only $2.08 a mo.

MA 1 . . . The **"Queen of Love"** Bridal Ensemble. 1000 Lucky Couples will save $7.75. For this Challenge Event we offer 1000 of these exquisitely matched Bridal Sets at a remarkable saving. The Engagement Ring is of most modern square prong design, beautifully hand engraved and set with a FIERY, GENUINE, BLUE-WHITE DIAMOND of exceptional brilliance. The Wedding Ring is adorned with FIVE perfectly matched, sparkling, genuine, blue-white diamonds. BOTH rings are offered in 14K SOLID WHITE *or* YELLOW GOLD. (Please specify your choice.)

Written Guarantee

Our usual bona-fide Diamond Guarantee is furnished with every Ensemble fully covering VALUE and QUALITY and provides for exchange within one year at FULL PURCHASE PRICE.

10 Days' Free Trial

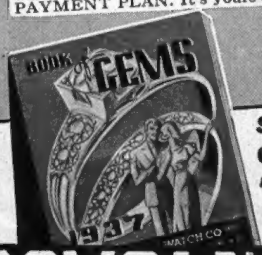
Every couple engaged or about to be, should see this beautiful Bridal Ensemble. Remember, $1.00 brings it for your examination and approval without obligation to buy unless you agree it's the greatest value of its kind ever offered. SEND for your bridal duo today! **Only $29.75 for BOTH. $1.00 down — $2.88 a month — less than 10c a day.**

If purchased separately:

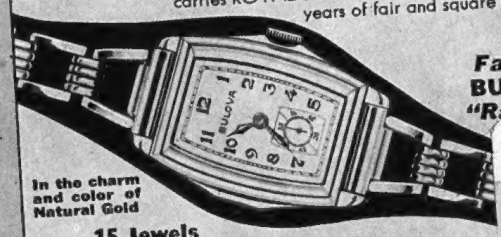
MA-1A... Engagement Ring Only.. $19.75. Only **$1.88 a mo.**
MA-1B... Wedding Ring Only ... $16.50. Only **$1.45 a mo.**
Your choice of 14K *White or Yellow Gold*

CATALOG FREE!
Hundreds of Other Great Values

In genuine Blue-White Diamonds, Standard Watches, Silverware and Gifts — and all offered on our LIBERAL TEN PAYMENT PLAN. It's yours for the asking!



USE YOUR CREDIT! BUY THE ROYAL WAY



In the charm and color of Natural Gold

15 Jewels

Famous* BULOVA *"Ranger"

$24.75

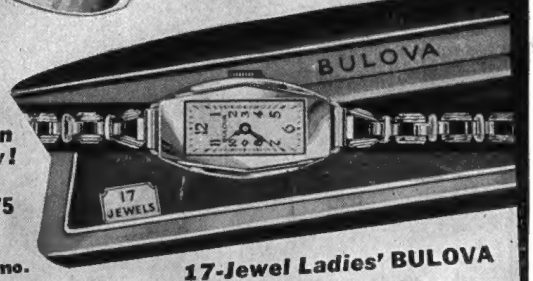
Only $2.38 a month

MA 2 . . . This season's new BULOVA created to present the greatest gent's wristwatch value ever offered. Streamlined Yellow rolled Gold plate case with handsome, new link bracelet. 15 Jewel BULOVA precision movement; fully guaranteed absolutely accurate timekeeper. A man's watch for **men** —an unbeatable value! **$24.75. $1.00 down — $2.38 a month — (Only 8c a day).**

Only $15.95

Genuine Diamond Set Initial Ring $1.49 a month

MA 3 . . . A new and strikingly handsome gent's Initial Ring of 10K Solid Yellow Gold. Oval shaped genuine Black Onyx top with raised white gold initial and one genuine diamond in a new, attractive setting. Our Challenge Price only **$15.95. $1.00 down — $1.49 a month — (Only 5c a day).**



First Time in History!

Only $24.75

$2.38 a mo.

17-Jewel Ladies' BULOVA

MA 4 . . . Here's "Tops" in ladies' wristwatch values! A stunning, new BULOVA in the popular oval-baguette style, and fitted with a fully guaranteed SEVENTEEN (17) Jewel BULOVA "radio-time" movement. Complete with dainty link bracelet. (White Only). **$24.75. $1.00 down, $2.38 a month. (8c a day).**

***Send for* OUR *New* 1937 "BOOK OF GEMS"**

FREE to grown-ups! Hundreds of marvelous "buys" in fine genuine blue-white diamonds, standard watches, exquisite jewelry, silverware, toilet sets, etc. 32 pages of feature values in quality items. Everything pictured and fully described. Send for your FREE copy today.

America's Largest Mail Order Credit Jewelers

ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO. Inc.

Established 1895

Address DEPT. 150-A

170 BROADWAY N.Y.C.

ANNOUNCEMENT
of New Coffee Agency Openings

●

OPEN TO MEN AND WOMEN

EARNINGS UP TO $60.00 IN A WEEK

Within the next two weeks, over 350 men and women will be given the opportunity to open up fine-paying Coffee Agencies right in their own home localities. If you are looking for a bona fide chance to make as high as $60.00 in a week, starting at once, this company will send you everything you need, give you all the help you require, and back you up with its proven successful plans. You risk no money. A chance to be independent, work as you please, and make more than just a modest living. If you want to know whether there is an opening for you in your own or nearby locality, mail the Application below. By return mail you will be notified whether we have an opening for you, and if we have, you will receive full information about this Coffee Agency Plan. You don't send a penny—just mail the Application. No obligation—you decide after you read the plan. Don't delay. Send your Application at once.

Clip Out and Mail Today!!

COFFEE AGENCY APPLICATION

(1) WRITE YOUR FULL NAME AND ADDRESS HERE!

Name.....
(State whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss)

Address.....

City and State.....

(2) HOW MUCH TIME CAN YOU DEVOTE To COFFEE AGENCY?

Mark with an "X"

☐ FULL TIME ☐ PART TIME

[Full time pays up to $35 to $60 in a week. Part time, either during the day or evenings, pays up to $22.50 in a week.]

(3) STATE WHICH BONUS YOU PREFER CASH OR FORD AUTOMOBILE?

In addition to their cash earnings, we offer our producers a cash bonus of $500.00 or a brand-new, latest model Ford Tudor Sedan. State which you would prefer if you decide to accept our offer. Mark "X" before your choice.

☐ $500. CASH BONUS ☐ LATEST MODEL FORD TUDOR SEDAN.

(4) CAN YOU START AT ONCE?

Mark with an "X" ☐ Yes ☐ No

If you cannot start at once, state about when you will be able to start.

ALL APPLICATIONS WILL BE HELD STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

SEND NO MONEY

There is no money fee of any kind required with this Application. It merely tells us that you would consider running a Coffee Agency in your locality if we have an opening for you. You will be notified *by return mail* whether your home locality is available. Then you can decide if the money-making possibilities look good to you. No obligation on your part. Those who apply first will be given preference, so be sure to mail your Application without delay—NOW! No letter is required, just the Application. Mail at once to

ALBERT MILLS, President
4144 Monmouth Avenue **Cincinnati, Ohio**

10¢ DIME WESTERN MAGAZINE

VOLUME XIX OCTOBER, 1937 NUMBER 2

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

All stories in magazines bearing this seal are written especially for this publisher and have never before been printed in any form!

Complete Western Novel

The Raw, Red Trail To Dodge! ..... Walt Coburn 10
In the night-shadowed no-man's-land of the Cherokee Strip, half a hundred Santell trail-wolves formed a murderous reception committee. . . . For Bob Amber, outlawed cowman, and his Diamond W herd were shoving up the trail to roaring Dodge!

Three Complete Western Novelettes

A Clansman Brings His Own War ..... Cliff Farrell 54
Exiled from his proud pioneer kin, young Dode Castleman had yet to learn the grim lesson of the frontier: That a real man never calls for help while he has breath left to fight!

Blind Man's Last Gun-Bluff ..... Stone Cody 78
Lane Corson's guns were silent; his body only an empty shell—yet his last life's blood must form the crimson deadline between a brave girl's ranch and a ruthless raider crew!

Gunsmoke Pays For Texas Cattle ..... John A. Saxon 106
Playing his own, lone-handed game, Randy Jessup safely guided those two hard-driven Texas cowmen and the girl—into the deadliest gun-trap that ever cursed that lawless border trail. . . .

Three Western Short Stories

Guns Can't Fight the White Death! ..... Harry F. Olmsted 44
Sheriff Howden willingly flung away, to the merciless storm-whipped blizzard winds, his hard-won honor, his pride—and a fifty-year battle!

Homestead On Boothill ..... Gunnison Steele 71
Helplessly, Dal Reardon watched the jaws of that desert death-trap close on him—and the girl he loved!

Bullets Are Easier ..... John G. Pearsol 98
Jimmy Slater was gambling his life—to protect a glorious lie!

—And—

Markers of Immortality ..... The Editors 4
No shrines of marble mark the greatest of all battle-grounds of a new Empire. . . .

A Cowman At Hell's Cross-Roads ..... Trail Rider 9
The blood of the frontier made Bob Givens stake his life and a girl's future on a thousand-to-one chance. . . .

In the Saddle ..... A Department 120

Published every month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter November 30, 1935, at the post office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright 1937 by Popular Publications, Inc. Single Copy price 10c. Yearly subscription in U. S. A. $1.00. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, kindly enclose stamped, self-addressed envelopes for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be executed in handling them.

Printed in U. S. A.

I WILL SEND MY FIRST LESSON FREE

It Shows How I Train You at Home in Your Spare Time for a

GOOD JOB IN RADIO

J. E. Smith, President
National Radio Institute
Established 1914
The man who has directed the home study training of more men for the Radio Industry than any other man in America.

Clip the coupon and mail it. I will prove I can train you at home in your spare time to be a RADIO EXPERT. I will send you my first lesson FREE. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand—how practical I make learning Radio at home. Men without Radio or electrical experience become Radio Experts—earn more money than ever as a result of my Training.

Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as $200 to $500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers, dealers as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts operate their own full time or part time Radio sales and service businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to $6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay, see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I have trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read their statements. Mail the coupon.

There's A Real Future in Radio for Well Trained Men

Radio already gives good jobs to more than 300,000 people. And in 1936, Radio enjoyed one of its most prosperous years. More than $500,000,000 worth of sets, tubes and parts were sold—an increase of more than 60% over 1935. Over a million Auto Radios were sold, a big increase over 1935. 24,000,000 homes now have one or more Radio sets, and more than 4,000,000 autos are Radio equipped. Every year millions of these sets go out of date and are replaced with newer models. More millions need servicing, new tubes, repairs, etc. A few hundred $30, $50, $75 a week jobs have grown to thousands in 20 years. And Radio is still a new industry—growing fast!

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Almost every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets. They show you how to do Radio repair jobs; how to cash in quickly. Throughout your training I send you plans that made good spare time money—$200 to $500 a year—for hundreds of fellows. My Training is famous as "the Course that pays for itself."

I Give You Practical Experience

My Course is not all book training. I send you special Radio equipment, show you how to conduct experiments, build circuits illustrating important principles used in modern Radio receivers, broadcast stations, loud-speaker installations. I show you how to build testing apparatus for use in spare time servicing from this equipment. Read about this 50-50 method of training—how it makes learning at home interesting, quick, fascinating, practical. Mail coupon.

Here's Proof

SERVICE MANAGER FOR FOUR STORES

"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N. R. I. In a few months I made enough to pay for the course three or four times. I am now Radio service manager for the M——— Furniture Co., for their four stores."—JAMES E. RYAN, 1535 Slade St., Fall River, Mass.

$10 WEEK IN SPARE TIME

"I have a very good spare time trade. At times it is more than I can handle. I make on an average of $40 per month profit, and that is spare time working week ends and some evenings." — IRA BIVANS, 102 Diagonal St., Savanna, Ill.

EARNINGS TRIPLED BY N. R. I. TRAINING

"I have been doing nicely, thanks to N. R. I. Training. My present earnings are about three times what they were before I took the Course. I consider N. R. I. Training the finest in the world."—BERNARD COSTA, 201 Kent St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Money Back Agreement Protects You

I am sure I can train you successfully. I agree in writing to refund every penny you pay me if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service when you finish. I'll send you a copy of this agreement with my Free Book.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Mail coupon for sample lesson and 64-page book. Both are free to anyone over 16 years old. My book points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste it on a penny post card—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7KS9
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON **FREE**

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7KS9
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send the sample lesson and your book which tells about the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....2FR

The Tested WAY to BETTER PAY

AUTO

BOOKS SENT FREE

on approval. Just mail the coupon and we'll send you a set of these remarkable auto books, just off the press. Whether you are a mechanic or helper, expert or apprentice, auto owner or driver, if you're interested in knowing all about automobile mechanics, then take advantage of this FREE OFFER.

Nearly 100 pages on DIESEL Engines

A better job — in the gigantic auto industry. BIGGER PAY — a chance to go into business for yourself and get a share of the huge profits are waiting for any man who even half tries to improve himself. Learn auto engineering with these wonder books a new way — without studying or memorizing. Simply use the JIFFY INDEX to look up the answer to any auto problem. Built by eleven of America's greatest automobile engineers, and written in simple language so you can understand it. Very newest cars, all covered.

CAN YOU FIX IT?

These wonder books tell step by step HOW to take out "play" in differential—to kill the shimmy in steering — to set TIMING — how to put your finger instantly on engine trouble and then the quick expert way to FIX it. Newest improvements fully covered. Equal to a complete trade course at less than a fourth the cost.

6 Big Volumes
1937 Edition

2500 pages, 2000 illustrations, wiring diagrams, etc., including Marine Engines, Aviation Motors, Diesel engines, etc. DeLuxe edition, gold-stamped flexible binding.

FREE Privilege of consulting Automobile Engineers of American Technical Society for one year without cost if you mail coupon immediately.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Drexel Avenue & 58th St., Dept. A-731, Chicago, Ill.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY,
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Dept. A731, Chicago, Ill.

I would like to see the new 6-volume edition of your AUTO BOOKS. I will pay the few cents delivery charges only, but if I choose to, I may return them express collect. If after 10 days' use I prefer to keep them, I will send you $2 and pay the balance at the rate of only $3 a month, until $24.80 is paid. Please include free consulting membership as per your offer above.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Attach letter, stating age, occupation and name and address of employer and that of at least one business man as reference.

ELECTRICITY

"LEARN BY DOING"
12 weeks training

I'LL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING!

My Big Free Book tells you how we train you in 12 weeks—to start in the growing field of Electricity, by actual shopwork on real electrical machinery—not by books or correspondence. Amazing plan enables many to get training first . . . then take 18 Months to pay in small monthly payments starting 5 Months from date you start school. Experience or advanced education not needed. Many Earn While Learning. Free lifetime employment service. Diesel Engines, Radio, Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning instruction included. MAIL COUPON for FREE BOOK and all Facts.

H. C. LEWIS, President, COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 77-76, Chicago, Ill.

Send Big Free Book with facts on Coyne training and tell me about your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan.

NAME..... AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

Law!

LEARN AT HOME

Are you adult, alert, ambitious, willing to study? Investigate LAW! We guide you step by step—furnish all texts, including 14-volume Law Library. Training prepared by leading law professors and given by members of bar. Degree of LL.B. conferred. Low cost, easy terms. Send NOW for Free, 64-page "Law Training for Leadership."

LaSalle Extension, Dept. 1033-L Chicago

Markers of Immortality

SOME time ago we took time off to show one of our Western writers, who had never before been east of the Mississippi, the country hereabouts. We didn't expect him to do much raving about the scenery, which, in many respects is distinctly grade B compared to his part of the country. But there are portions of the Atlantic seaboard which have a claim to fame all their own. He got it almost at once.

"Gosh!" he said, "If George Washington stayed the night in all the houses that have signs out saying he slept in them, he must have had a bicycle or something!"

We agreed, and pointed out a little park with a monument, saying that there had been quite a brush with the Hessians at that point, back in Revolutionary times.

That got us to wondering why people have to have those carved stones of granite or marble to remember events which they should remember anyway, as being so gloriously part and parcel of their own history. For newcomers, certainly, they serve their purpose. Perhaps it's because, in the rush and struggle of modern living, we're likely to pass over the names of heroes long dead, and neglect spots which their blood has hallowed.

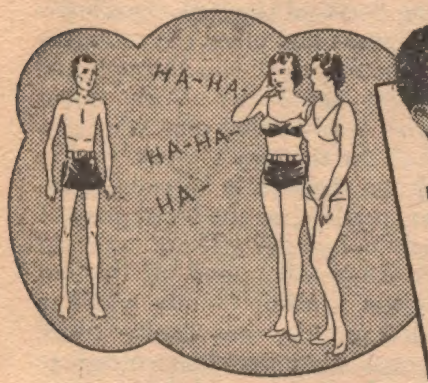
What about the West, we wanted to know. Of course there are monuments in plenty—the Alamo is a shrine that serves as fitting tribute to Texans' immortal courage, and there's the heroic statue of the Pioneer Woman, holding a rifle and an infant, with her eyes turned resolutely toward the land of her dreams; the tremendous carvings in the rocks of the Black Hills, and others. Yet, some of the greatest events known to this country—and which carried their significance far beyond the boundaries of our nation—go as yet unmarked.

Who knows for a certainty the exact route of the old Chisholm Trail? Or many of the other trails which played such a dramatic part in the development of the cattle frontier?

Out from Dodge, waving fields of grain grow where once the great trail herds bedded down. Yet, still in the dust a series of ridges run south and West—the last memento of the millions of head of cattle which, over sixty years ago, thundered up the trail.

(Continued on page 6)

THE GIRLS LAUGHED AT HIS SKINNY FORM!



Irvin Echard

"It's no fun to have everybody laughing at you and calling you scarecrow. I was so skinny and weak I didn't want to go out. Finally I tried IRONIZED YEAST. In five weeks I gained 14 lbs. and I'm good and husky all over. Now I go out regularly and have all kinds of good times."
—*Irvin Echard, Barberton, O.*

– till he gained 14 LBS. QUICK this new, easy scientific way

New IRONIZED YEAST gives thousands 10 TO 25 POUNDS *in a few weeks!*

THOUSANDS of skinny, rundown men and women who never could put on an ounce before have recently gained 10 to 25 pounds of solid flesh, new pep and popularity —*in just a few weeks!*

They've taken this new, scientific formula, Ironized Yeast, which although perfected at the cost of many thousands of dollars, comes to you in pleasant little tablets which cost you only a few cents a day!

Why it builds so quick

Scientists have discovered that many are thin and rundown simply because they do not get enough yeast vitamins (Vitamin B) and iron in their daily food. One of the richest sources of marvelous health-building Vitamin B is the special yeast used in making English ale, world-renowned for its medicinal properties.

Now by a new and costly process, the vitamins from this imported English ale yeast are concentrated to *7 times* their strength in ordinary yeast! This 7-power concentrate is combined with 3 kinds of strength-building iron (organic, inorganic and hemoglobin iron). Pasteurized English ale yeast and other valuable tonic ingredients are added. Finally, for your protection and benefit, every batch of Ironized Yeast is tested and retested biologically, to insure its full vitamin strength.

The result is these marvelous little Ironized Yeast tablets which have helped thousands of the skinniest, scrawniest people quickly to gain normally attractive pounds, natural development, peppy health.

Make this money-back test

If, with the very first package of Ironized Yeast, you don't begin to eat better and to get more enjoyment and benefit from your food—if you don't feel better, with more strength, pep and energy—if you are not absolutely convinced that Ironized Yeast will give you the pounds of normally attractive flesh you need — your money will be promptly refunded. So get Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist today.

Special FREE offer!

To start thousands building up their health right away, we make this absolutely FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results with the very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 3410, Atlanta, Ga.

WARNING: Beware of the many cheap substitutes for this successful formula. Insist on genuine Ironized Yeast.

Posed by professional models

FREE ENLARGEMENT

Just to get acquainted with new customers, we will beautifully enlarge one snapshot negative (film) to 8x10 inches—FREE—if you enclose this ad with 10c for return mailing. Information on hand tinting in natural colors sent immediately. Your negative will be returned with your free enlargement. Send it today.

GEPPERT STUDIOS Dept. 722, Des Moines, Iowa

HEAT 1½¢ Per Hour!

AMAZING INVENTION—New Radiant Heater. Burns 96% air. Makes its own gas. No piping. No installation. Gives roomful of clean, healthful, penetrating heat, like sunshine, for 1½ cents an hour. Hotter than gas or electricity, at 1-10th the cost. Easy to light and operate. No smoke. No soot or ashes. No odor. Portable—carry it anywhere. Low priced. Guaranteed.

AGENTS! Make big money. New easy plan. Write quick for territory and Outfit Offer!

30-DAYS' TRIAL

Liberal Offer. Try it 30 days at our expense. Write at once for special, introductory, low-price offer and no-risk trial opportunity. No obligation. Send today.

THE AKRON LAMP CO.
900 High Street, Akron, Ohio

Train at Home to

win out

in business

Do you want a better position and a higher salary? You can have these if you can do the work. LaSalle experts will show you how, guide you step by step to success and help solve your personal business problems through the time-saving LaSalle Problem Method. Our unusual training plan enables you to prepare during your spare hours, without interference with your present duties. Simply mark on the coupon the field in which you desire success, and we will mail you a valuable book describing the opportunities in that field, together with an outline of our training service. Also copy of "Ten Years' Promotion in One." There is no cost or obligation. Find out how the *salary-increasing plan* has started many average men and women on the high road to success and financial independence. Check and mail the coupon NOW.

Find Yourself Through LaSalle

LASALLE EXTENSION—adult business training
Dept. 10334-R Chicago

Tell me about your training for my advancement in the business field checked.

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Modern Salesmanship
- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Railway Station Mgm't
- ☐ Railway Accounting
- ☐ Law—Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Managem't
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence
- ☐ Modern Foremanship
- ☐ Office Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ Stenotypy
- ☐ Credit and Collection Correspondence

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

(Continued from page 4)

And what of those lesser heroes, whose courage and perseverance were certainly deserving of more than passing, anonymous mention in some dusty book dealing with the early frontier? What of those men who risked and often gave their lives in the spring floods of the Red, the Cimarron, the Arkansas and other rivers so that their saddlemates might win through and take the great herds on? What about those stalwart lone-handed men who considered it all in the day's work to live dangerously on their little spreads, fighting weather, rustlers, or the hired guns of grasping cattle barons? There was old Buckshot Roberts who stood off thirteen of the toughest Lincoln County warriors single-handed until he was finally killed. Only then could they get close enough to discover that he had been fighting when he was all but dead from his wounds. That was only one example of deep, calm courage in the face of hopeless odds that is usually the cornerstone of character for those who finally conquer new lands.

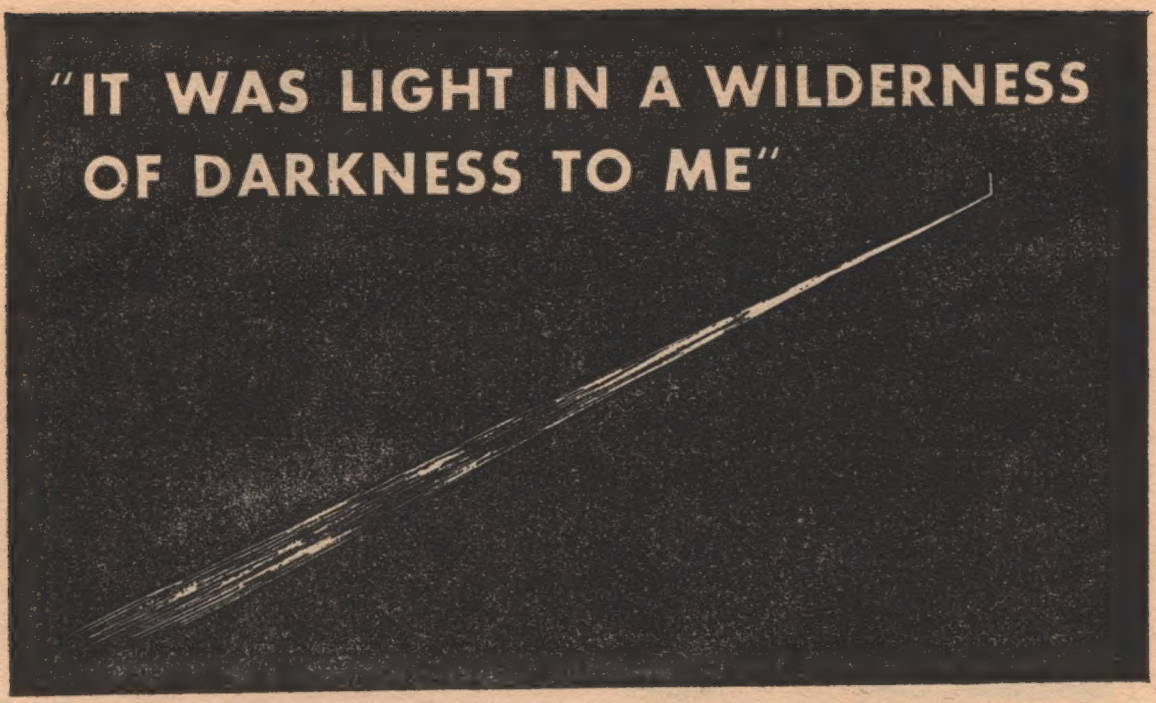
Such instances—many of them unknown; many of them safeguarded in the family archives of a pioneer-bred people—are so numerous as to almost become commonplace in a country where physical courage and almost superhuman determination were taken as a matter of course. Should anyone have accused those men, during their life-times, of being heroes, doubtlessly the word would have been taken in the same spirit as that harsher epithet which, we are told, must be said with a smile.

Physcial monuments to such glorious courage must seem small indeed. And so must any lifeless memento seem when compared to the fine spirit which accepted the despair and loneliness, the heart-breaking work and sacrifice which was an integral part of the pioneer existence.

In the yet unconquered majestic mountains; in the broad sweep of plain and desert, and in the hearts of those whose souls are of the West—let those be sufficient monuments for the men and women who asked no odds of fate, who wanted only the chance to fight for their own life, in the way they saw fit. And let us do homage to them in the living, colorful stories which their lives inspire!

—THE EDITORS

"IT WAS LIGHT IN A WILDERNESS OF DARKNESS TO ME"



"I WAS STUCK. A wife and three kiddies—and the same old pay envelope. I couldn't see a thing ahead except the same old grind. Then one day I read an I. C. S. ad. The coupon fascinated me. A new idea struck me—it was a light in a wilderness of darkness to me! Today, because I mailed that coupon two years ago, I am a trained man—making a trained man's pay!"

Does this suggest something to you? Then mail the coupon today!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 3275-D, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting	☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Boilermaker	☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation	☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Building Estimating	☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Air Conditioning	☐ Chemistry
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio	☐ Steam Engineer	☐ Pharmacy
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Mechanical Engineering	☐ Steam Electric Engineer	☐ Coal Mining
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Mine Foreman ☐ Fire Bosses
☐ Management of Inventions	☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker	☐ R. R. Locomotives	☐ Navigation
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Patternmaker	☐ R. R. Section Foreman	☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Diesel Engines	☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen	☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas	☐ Aviation Engines	☐ Highway Engineering	☐ Agriculture
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints	☐ Automobile Mechanic	☐ Civil Engineering	☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals	☐ Refrigeration	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Poultry Farming

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Service Station Salesmanship	☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Secretarial Work	☐ First Year College Subjects	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Spanish	☐ Business Correspondence	☐ College Preparatory
☐ Accountancy	☐ French	☐ Stenography and Typing	☐ Illustrating
☐ Cost Accountant	☐ Salesmanship	☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier	☐ Cartooning
☐ C. P. Accountant	☐ Advertising	☐ Railway Mail Clerk	☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

☐ Home Dressmaking	☐ Advanced Dressmaking	☐ Millinery	☐ Foods and Cookery
☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing		☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering	

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

15¢

STAR WESTERN

THE BIG 160 PAGE MAGAZINE

You won't want to miss this issue of the magazine written by men who know and love the Old West! Thrill to the heroic, odds-on fight put up by the famous tamer of the roaring towns, Waite McArdle, as he faces the guns of the Helldorado renegades, in Harry F. Olmsted's dramatic and colorful lead novel, "A Town to Die For!" Also strong, humanly dramatic novelettes —"Gunsmoke Dip for Texas Fever," by Bart Cassidy; "Brotherhood of Gunflame," by John G. Pearsol; "An Owlhooter Adopts a Town," by Harry Sinclair Drago; "Strange Guns Invade the Rim Rock," by Charles A. Tyler, and more grand stories by such famous authors as Peter Dawson, Harlan Graves, Foster-Harris, and others! Reserve this big bargain issue today at your newsstand!

On Sale September 3rd!

DON'T FORGET—that the two-fisted writing men whose stories you read and enjoy in these pages also give you the same salty authentic yarns of the Old West in these other famous Popular Publication magazines—

ACE-HIGH **PIONEER WESTERN**

BIG-BOOK WESTERN

Buy them today at your newsstand!

---

10 Stories — 10 Cents!

Coburn and Olmsted set the thundering pace to Old West adventure in September **Ten Story Western.** . . . Don't miss Walt Coburn's thrilling drama of an outlawed shotgun guard's glorious sacrifice on the one-way trip to fighting men's boothill—"Dead Heroes Guard the Stage." . . . Another unforgettable novelette, Harry F. Olmsted's "Mountain Man's Call To War," breaks trail to excitement on the Northwest's early fur frontier. Also you'll want to read Tom Roan's smashing range-war novel, and the all-star Western short stories by Pearsol, Steele, Dutcher, Lewis and other leading writers.

Buy it today at your newsstand!

10 STORY WESTERN MAGAZINE

A Cowman at Hell's Cross-Roads

IF BOB GIVENS hadn't met Sally McGuire at the schoolhouse dance, perhaps he'd have been satisfied to continue most of his life as a puncher for Old Man Wilson's Flying W. But there was something in Sally's blue eyes that made a man think of a spread of his own, and a vine-shaded porch. . . .

"Wait a year," he told Sally. "In a year I'll have enough saved up to get a few head of cattle on shares. We'll have a spread of our own. . . .

Sally's brown eyes softened. She loved him—and she'd wait.

Then came what Bob thought was his big chance. He quit old Man Wilson and signed on as trail hand, driving a small pool herd up to Ellsworth.

When he hit that roaring end-of-trail town, he sluiced the dust from his throat and sat down to a few hands of draw poker. But when Bob started back he was cleaned out.

It was Molly who laughed off his own shame and disappointment, though her lips trembled as she kissed him. "Listen," she told him. "Next spring there'll be more cattle going up the trail. Try again. . . ."

Bob's lean jaw set. He went back to Old Man Wilson's spread, and worked harder than ever before.

Next spring, Old Man Wilson told Bob to boss the herd up the trail. That would mean more money. . . .

Bob delivered the herd, sent the money back to his boss, and started out looking for cheap range. It was fall before he found some good grazing land up in Montana. He wrote to Sally, telling her to come on up.

Bob, alone on his little spread, had gathered his winter feed, had noted the sheltered pasture which should afford the best wintering for his few head of cattle. But the snow never quit. Big cattlemen went to the wall that winter, and the little fellows were ruined. Through the long days, Bob rode out in the blinding, freezing blizzard, trying to save what stock he could. A few half frozen calves he took back, nursed with the last remnants of warm milk. Then the feed gave out. . . .

One night, gaunt and red-eyed from lack of sleep, he sat staring bleakly into the future which he felt had tricked him. It was no use to keep on fighting that hopeless battle. He was wiped out—through. He'd been battling so desperately that he hadn't realized it had been months since he'd heard from Sally.

Embittered, heartsick, he was scarcely conscious that a red dawn was breaking, or of the first warm breath of the Chinook.

Bob Givens listened numbly to the steady drip-drip of the melting snow. And then he paused.

There, the team struggling through the soggy drifts, came a livery sled from town. Wrapped in a bearskin coat beside the driver, sat Sally. Then she was floundering toward him, her arms outstretched.

"I sent you letters and letters, Bob," she gasped, "but I guess they didn't get through. And—Oh, I'm so glad to be here—with you . . .!"

He smiled down at her. Then he shook his head. "Sally, I'm cleaned out—like the rest of the cowmen around here. Lost every cent. I was—I was just figgerin' that it would better if—"

He didn't finish, for Sally placed her fingers against his lips. "I know," she said softly. "But don't say it, Bob. We're here to live—to stay. And we can fight things out together. Just think—a new country; you and me. Even if we do start from nothing, we'll have so much more than anyone else in the world . . .!"

He read something then in the girl's shining eyes, in the loyalty which was so splendidly a part of her. And he knew that he'd keep on trying and making a better fight for her, and for the new country which they would make their own. . . .

—TRAIL RIDER.

THE RAW, RED TRAIL

. . . . They were putting up a desperate, hopeless defense. . . .

By Walt Coburn

(Author of "Lone Wolf of the Feud Trails," etc.)

How could Bob Amber, hunted renegade cowman, hope to take the remnants of his once-great Diamond W herd through to roaring Dodge? For the shadows of the desolate Strip hid half a hundred Santell trail wolves—sworn to fatten their herds with his stock, and swell their purses with the dead-or-alive blood-bounty on his reckless head!

THE rawboned, sandy-haired cowman with a cast in his left eye hoisted the small boy on the whiskey-stained bar.

"The button takes a tall glass," he grinned tipsily at the saloon man, "so's we kin water his likker. He's a mite young to take 'er straight. Eh, Tad?"

"Twelve years ain't so damn young." The tow-headed, blue-eyed boy in ragged

TO DODGE!

A vigorously dramatic novel of the thundering cattle trail!

cotton shirt and jeans spat through his teeth and tried to look as tough as the man seemed to expect.

"Whiskey," said the saloonman, setting out the bar bottle and glasses, "stunts a young 'un's growth. Andy, I don't noways like the idee in feedin' hard likker to bald-faced yearlin's. I'd ruther—"

The sandy-haired man's long barreled six-shooter rapped on the bar. His mismated bloodshot eyes fixed the saloonman with a look that made the latter chop his words off with a gulp.

The man with the gun turned sideways, the grin still on his slitted mouth. He held the gun loosely in his hand as his glance swept the dozen or more men, cowpunchers mostly, who stood lined along the bar.

"Any you gents got anything to say as to what me and my young 'un drink?"

"He's yourn, Andy," said the man nearest.

"Nobody's crossin' you, Andy," said the saloonman placatingly. "Put up your smoke-pole. I don't want no trouble in here. Ain't got the place swamped up yet from the way them Diamond W cowhands left 'er last week. I don't want no trouble with you. Neither does these boys."

"You're damn right! You don't none of you want trouble with Long Andy San-

tell—ner any of the Santell tribe. Eh, Tad?"

"Your damn right," nodded the tow-headed boy. He put a small, grimy hand on the big six-shooter he carried in a holster fastened to a home made cartridge belt.

"Tad's got the makin's of a shore enough tough 'un," said the sandy-haired man. "He's li'ble to turn out to be the toughest of the Santell tribe. And, gentle Annies, that'll be shore-enough tough. Belly up to the bar, men, and have one on young Tad Santell. He kin out-ride, out-rope, out-fight, out-cuss, out-drink ary button his size, age or weight in Texas. His daddy died with his boots on and his gun a-smokin'. I'm his legal appointed guardeen. He's a goin' up the trail with the Nueces Pool herd. Eh, Tad?"

"Your damn right," agreed the boy again, his voice too loud, too shrill.

The scarred, swinging half-doors of the saloon were pushed apart and a tall, dust-powdered man stepped inside. He stood there for a moment, his hand on his gun. He needed a shave and his week's whiskers showed black through the powdering of trail dust. Under the slanted hatbrim his hair showed crisply black. His face was bronzed by weather, making his gray eyes steel-colored by contrast. He was a well-made man, wide shouldered, slim flanked, with an almost handsome face, and his head was tilted at an arrogant angle. He had the air of a man accustomed to giving orders and having them obeyed.

Apparently he was a stranger in San Angelo, for neither the saloonman nor any of the men on the front side of the bar nodded him a greeting. His swift glance swept them, then his hand came away from his gun. He walked to the bar, taking his place a few feet along the open space from where Long Andy Santell stood, the boy on the bar swinging his booted, spurred heels.

THE newcomer gave the boy a hard, steady, not unfriendly look, then turned to the man behind the bar. He disregarded Long Andy Santell.

"Did the Diamond W trail herd pass up through San Angelo a few days back?" His voice was slurred, drawling, but not Texan.

"About six days ago."

"There was a little shootin' trouble in town?"

"Right here in this saloon, stranger." The saloonman flicked a covert glance at Long Andy Santell who leaned against the bar, his hand on the gun he'd shoved back in the holster tied low on his thigh.

"There was a young cowhand killed in here? One they called Gary?"

"The boys give the young feller a right smart burial," replied the saloonman, shifting an uneasy glance towards Andy Santell. "His grave was marked with a headpiece with his name, Gary Amber, carved on it."

The black-haired stranger nodded. "I saw the grave at your San Angelo boot-hill. Who killed him?"

"Well, sir, not knowin', couldn't say. When the caps commenced bustin' I ducked behind my bar. And mister, I stayed there, belly on the floor. When the shootin' was over, I came up, sorter, fer air. The place was thick with powder-smoke. Two dead on the floor and two-three more wounded. One of the dead fellers was this young gent they called Gary. The fightin' was betwixt the Diamond W men and some of the Nueces Pool outfit. Just a case of cowboys in town, mixin' likker and gunpowder. Have a drink."

"The button," said Long Andy Santell, "is celebratin' his birthday. He's buyin'."

The stranger's gray eyes fixed Long Andy with a hard, penetrating look. Andy's thin-lipped mouth was twisted in a faint, unpleasant grin. His long hand

with its broken, black nails, was on the cedar butt of his gun.

"Abusing a good horse," said the stranger, his unhurried drawl without a hint of excitement, "Kicking a dog. Striking a woman. Feeding a small boy whiskey. They all come under the same category. If you're that boy's father, you need horsewhippin' and a coat of tar and feathers. And you'd sure get it in the country I come from!"

Long Andy Santell's gun was sliding from its tied holster when the stranger sprang. His fist caught Long Andy on the side of his long, lantern jaw. There was the dull, sickening crack of broken bone, Long Andy went reeling backwards, bewilderment and pain in his greenish eyes. The gun in his hand exploded, its heavy slug tearing through the bar a few inches from the boy's dangling legs. A second blow caught the reeling man on his hooked nose. Blood spurted as water might from a burst hose. Long Andy dropped in a twitching, snarling heap. The stranger kicked the gun from his hand. Then he turned and faced the crowd.

"If you're friends of this thing on the floor, you'd better drag him to a doctor. His jaw and nose will need setting. Or are you taking up his fight for him?"

"Not me, Cap," said one of them, saluting awkwardly. "And I'd say that goes fer the—Look out, Cap! Behind yuh!"

The man whirled, caught the long barrel of the old six-shooter in the boy's hand and wrenched it upward just as it exploded with a blinding flash that threw burned powder in the man's face. He twisted the gun from the boy's grasp, throwing the weapon in a corner. Then he lifted the youngster, who was kicking, screaming curses and fighting with flailing boots and fists. He laid the boy across the bar and jerking off the youngster's belt, doubled it. Still without a trace of anger, he proceeded to give the boy a thorough strapping, until tears rolled down the youngster's unwashed face and he was biting his lips to keep from yelling.

Young Tad Santell didn't bawl or beg for mercy. Tears of pain coursed down his face that was white under its coating of tan and dirt. Exhausted, he quit struggling. He lay on his belly across the bar, his fists clenched, his face screwed with pain. The man quit the strapping.

"Got enough? Learned your lesson not to shoot at a man's back?"

"Yes," came the panting, whispered reply through gritted teeth.

"Say 'yes, *sir*', when you talk to me!"

"Yes—sir."

The stranger lifted him down from the bar, keeping a grip on the boy's shoulder.

Long Andy Santell had crawled off a few feet. He was sitting on the floor, his broken, blood-covered face in his hands, moaning. Then he was very sick.

"Is that manly looking specimen your

HIJACKED!

• Don't let unknown blades hijack shaving comfort—switch to Star Single-edge Blades, today! Made since 1880 by the makers of the original safety razor, their keener edges give steady shaving satisfaction! 4 for 10¢ everywhere.
Star Blade Division, Brooklyn, N.Y.

FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

STAR Blades 4 FOR 10¢

father?" asked the stranger, glancing at Andy.

"No . . . No—sir. He's a sorta shirt-tail uncle. He's Long Andy Santell, an' he's the toughest, hardest case east of the Pecos. My dad was killed in the war ag'in' the damn Yankees. He fit with Quantrell."

"You recollect his daddy, Cap?" said the man who had saluted. "He was Joe Santell."

"I remember Joe Santell. But I can't place you, mister."

"You seen me only once, Cap. I stopped one night at your camp on my way to Texas, after Lee's surrender. You wouldn't remember me. But you'd recollect Sergeant Joe Santell, from what they tell of him."

The black-haired man nodded. He looked down at the boy who was wiping tears from his dirty face with his shirt sleeve.

"You're Sergeant Joe Santell's boy? Your father was a brave man, son, and a fine soldier. He wouldn't be proud to own a son that shot at a man's back. Who taught you bushwhacking tricks? That slobbering thing yonder?"

"Yes—sir. I didn't aim to be shootin' at a man's back. But you'd knocked Long Andy down, and I'm a Santell. The youngest of the tribe."

"Mother livin', son?"

"No, sir. I'm just a maverick. I only got shirt-tail kinfolks, like Long Andy, there."

"If he's a fair sample, you're mixed with a bad lot." He let go the boy's shoulder and grinned, holding out his hand. "Suppose we bury the hatchet? I'm sorry I had to strap you. But it did you more good than the whiskey that Long Andy was feedin' you. Suppose you get a lot of soap and water and a towel. A tubbin' wouldn't do you any harm."

"I kin fix him up, mister," said the saloonman. "He needs it. Come on to the back, Tad. Boys, a couple of you drag Long Andy outa here." Then he turned to the black-haired man. "Mister, you done a job that I've bin wantin' to do fer a long time, and the best I got in the house ain't too good fer you. I'll be back directly I git Tad to scrubbin'. And I'll open up a bottle of the best Kentucky whiskey you ever throwed lip over. I'd like to know the name of the man that broke Long Andy's ugly jaw."

"Lemme tell him, Cap," grinned the man who had saluted. "I want to see his eyes booger out. Boys, this is Captain Bob Amber, of Quantrell's Guerillas! That orter call fer the best in the house."

Young Tad Santell, his hand still gripped in the man's, looked up at him with a gasp that left his mouth open. Then he shut it with a snap. His blue eyes danced.

"Gawdamighty! I bin strapped by—by Cap'n Bob Amber hisself!" he said huskily.

"And you'll get strapped again every time I hear you cuss," said the man. "How'd you like to go up the trail with me, Tad? With the Diamond W herd?"

"You mean—me? You mean . . . ?" He shot a look around, his eyes hunting Long Andy Santell. But the beaten man had slipped out the door and was gone.

"Long Andy's my legal guardeen," he said. "He'd whup me till I was half dead if I run off from him."

"We'll take our chances on that, Tad. I owe a lot to Sergeant Joe Santell. You're his son. I'll take you along. Now get scrubbed up, and don't crawl back into those filthy rags. You don't want to louse up the Diamond W outfit. I'll get you some decent duds. Rattle your young hocks, Tad. Scrub up—and wash out your mouth, just for luck!"

When the boy had gone and the saloonman returned, Bob Amber drank with the men at the bar. He looked at the saloonman.

"You still don't know who shot my

young brother, Gary Amber, here in this saloon?"

"So help me God, Cap'n, I don't! They was all a-shootin' at once. The Diamond W men and the Nueces Pool hands—Santells mostly."

"Long Andy Santell?"

"Long Andy was with 'em. I'd just put young Tad in the back room to sleep off the whiskey Long Andy'd bin feedin' him earlier in the evenin'. I'd just got back behind the bar and was tappin' a fresh keg when the shootin' commenced. The Diamond W boys kin tell you more of what happened. The young Gary feller was your brother?"

"My kid brother. I'd lost track of him after the Yankees shot me full of holes and threw me in prison. I escaped a few months ago. Heard he was in Texas, workin' for the Diamond W. Then at Pecos I heard he'd been shot here at San Angelo. H'mm . . . This is good likker!"

"A Kentuckian should know his own whiskey, Cap'n. Have another. You rode with the James boys? Jesse and Frank?"

"I rode with the James boys," smiled Bob Amber, smoothing his drooping black moustache, "till they cut me down in Missouri. Down here, men remember Captain Bob Amber who rode with Quantrell's cavalry. But further north the name of Bob Amber is outlawed on reward dodgers." He lifted his glass.

"Sergeant Joe Santell saved my life twice. He died fighting alongside me. I'd like to propose a toast to his son, Tad. May the boy be as brave and loyal as the man who was his father!"

CHAPTER TWO

A Maverick Finds a Brand

PUT a price on a man's head and you've written more than one name off that man's list of friends. Even in towns like San Angelo where a Confederate note still bought a drink, where Quantrell and his men were heroes, and not outlaws who had carried on a hard-riding guerilla warfare after Lee's surrender—even there, where Northerners were all damn Yankees, there were men who'd be glad of the chance to put a bullet in Captain Bob Amber's back and collect U. S. government bounty money.

"We'll pull out after dark, Tad," Bob Amber told the boy. The kid was scrubbed and dressed in new clothes; he was fragrant with bay rum the barber had generously applied to his freshly cut straw-colored hair.

"Yes, sir."

"I reckon," smiled Bob Amber, "that, you've had your lesson in manners. You just call me Bob."

"I'd ruther I could call you 'Cap'n'."

The man looked almost boyish as he smiled, and the glint left his gray eyes.

"Cap'n she is then, partner. We'll hit the trail after supper and ride in the starlight. We should overtake the Diamond W herd about Albany, where the trails fork north. The one branch, the Potter and Bacon trail leads to Cheyenne, in Wyoming. The Western Trail crosses the Red River at Doan's Crossing and crosses Oklahoma by way of Elk City, then on to Dodge City. There's the Eastern Trail that Chisholm made north through Oklahoma City to Wichita Kansas, then Abilene. The Diamond W herd will take the Potter and Bacon Trail, or the Western Trail."

"The Nueces Pool herd is trailin' to Dodge City," volunteered Tad a little importantly. "I got a hundred head of steers in my dad's JS iron in the Pool herd, along with Long Andy's and Uncle Hon's and Cousin Jep's stuff and the littler irons in the pool. They're a tough spread, Cap'n. They aim to fatten the herd on the way north, Long Andy brags. And he don't mean the steers will put taller on their ribs, neither. He means the herd'll tally

out at the north end of the trail with more than when they started. They'll pick up cattle that's spilled from the Diamond W and other herds crossin' No Man's Land and the Cherokee Strip country. There's Santells livin' in No Man's Land right now—tough hands. They bin whittlin' on herds goin' up the trail."

"For a button that's never been north of the Nueces River till now," smiled Bob Amber, "you're wiser'n a hat full of young owls."

"Long Andy's bin tellin' me. And I was raised up to keep my mouth shut and my ears and eyes open. I ain't missed any more than I could help. Long Andy and Hon and Jep and the other shirt-tail kinfolks set around a jug and tell 'er scarey. Sometimes they fight amongst their-se'ves."

Bob Amber had seen other boys like Tad. Ranch-born, raised around cowmen, they learned man-things before they could spell out the words in their McGuffy's third reader. Tad was like a little old man when he talked of cattle and horses and the men who followed the cattle trails. Orphaned and thrown among men like Long Andy, Tad was being cheated and robbed of his boyhood. He was taking hardships and rough treatment as a matter of course. Perhaps he was secretly missing the fun and companionship of boys his own age, cut off from games and laughter. Already his boy's face was being molded into grim lines.

He smiled reluctantly and seldom laughed, carrying his boy's grief and troubles to the secret darkness of a tarp-covered bed on the ground under the stars, where sheer weariness deadened his boy's dreams. Bob Amber felt a deep pity for the boy whose environment had been so cramped and warped and ugly, and his only companions men like Long Andy.

Captain Bob Amber remembered Tad's father, Joe Santell, when he had joined Quantrell's cavalry—a tall, rawboned, tow-headed man with puckered blue eyes and quiet voice. But Joe Santell was the best man he'd ever watched handle a green horse. He was a dead shot, and absolutely without fear in any sort of a tight spot. He'd been quick to catch onto army ways. Intelligent in spite of his lack of education, self-taught and eager to learn, he could handle men as well as horses.

Sergeant Joe Santell had died fighting alongside Bob Amber against odds that piled up twenty to one. He'd died with fighting lights in his blue eyes and a tight lipped grin on his mouth, a horse pistol crashing in each hand.

Tad would make such a man. He'd make a mark for himself, if given the proper training. And Bob Amber told himself that was what he was going to give the son of fighting Joe Santell, who'd been outlawed with Quantrell and Bob Amber, Jesse and Frank James, the Youngers and other men who had chosen the life of a hunted renegade rather than make peace with the carpet-baggers.

BOB AMBER hung around a little while in the saloon, picking up what bits of news he could regarding the gun fight. The saloonman was reluctant about discussing it; scared, no doubt, of the Santells who would be fetching their pool herd up from the Nueces country in a few days. Long Andy, Bob Amber learned from Tad, was in charge of the herd and had come to town alone with the boy on some business he'd kept to himself.

Bob Amber could understand the saloonman's reluctance concerning any loose talk about the fight between the Nueces men and the Diamond W cowhands. A saloonman's business was on his own side of the bar.

"Most likely," he told Bob later on that night, in the little saloon office, "it was over cards or some cattle argument or just orneriness bustin' out like a rash amongst the Santells. Hell, them Santells

are always spoilin' fer trouble. When outsiders is scarce, they gun-whup one another around. They're Missourians, mostly, though Joe's branch was Texans, born and raised. They're all as hard a lot as you'd hate to meet of a dark night along the trail. Cap'n, I wouldn't loaf along the way between here and Albany where you'll overtake the Diamond W herd. There's a price on your scalp. Them Missouri Santells is bushwhackers, jayhawkers that was worse than the Yanks in Kansas. They was turncoats durin' the war; spies and worse than spies ag'in' the Confederacy, robbin' small ranchers, mistreatin' wimmen, sellin' information to the Yanks. Long Andy rode outa San Angelo after the doctor patched him up. Takin' Tad away from him was like stealin' a wolf pup from the litter. Though if thanks kin come from the grave, Joe Santell is doin' that, right now.

"Tad's mother," Jake Murphy, the saloonman continued, "was as fine a little lady as ever walked. Joe married her at Fort Scott, in Kansas. Sort of a runaway marriage. Her father was a army man, a Yankee. I reckon the Santell tribe dealt her plenty misery after Joe rode off to join Quantrell. She was too proud to let him know how they treated her when he was away, callin' her a damn Yankee and such. Doc called it lung trouble and pneumonia that took her, but my missus called it a broken heart and grief. She died here in San Angelo, when Tad was seven-eight years old, near the close of the War. Then Joe got his lead ticket, and Long Andy taken the boy, Tad."

Jake Murphy told Bob Amber what there was to tell about the renegade Santells. And Tad's mother, who had died of lonesomeness and grief and homesickness.

"Her maiden name was Macklin. Her father worked up to the rank of major in the cavalry. Mebby you heard of Major Hugh Macklin?"

Bob Amber whistled noiselessly, his gray eyes lighting strangely. "We fought Macklin's cavalry in a few skirmishes," he nodded. "I didn't know Joe Santell had run off with his daughter. That explains. . . ."

But Bob Amber didn't tell the saloonman what it explained. His words trailed off into silence. And when darkness fell he and Tad saddled their horses and rode out of town, headed north.

Tad was riding a tough, hammer-headed dun that wore his father's JS iron on the left thigh.

Bob Amber was forking a mahogany bay that the saloonman, Murphy, had insisted on giving him as a present, indignantly refusing Bob's money.

"Gosh, Cap'n," said Tad, "that bay Red Cloud horse is the best 'un around San Angelo. Jake Murphy's turned down some awful big money for him. Red Cloud's a Morgan bred horse, outa Kentucky."

Bob Amber smiled then, remembering warm-hearted Jake Murphy's parting words. "Kentucky likker, aged in the wood. A Morgan hoss from the blue grass country. Cap'n Amber, I'd be plumb proud to have you ride Red Cloud. And here's a bottle of twenty year old whiskey to shorten your miles. The Irish love horses and good whiskey as well as you Kentuckians do. The missus took care of Tad and his mother an' she'll rest easier in her grave, knowin' I could do a bit for the man that's takin' young Tad along, away from the jayhawker Santell tribe. And if the missus is in heaven where she belongs, she'll be sayin' a bit of a prayer for the both of ye."

The whiskey-bleared eyes of the saloonman had misted, his voice thickened to a hint of brogue from his boyhood in Ireland. He had come to the barn to see them off and had gripped Bob Amber's hand in a viselike clamp, whispering a last caution in the darkness.

"You ain't done with Long Andy and his tribe. Ride careful!"

WHEN they had ridden beyond the lights of San Angelo, Tad's arm pointed eastward. "If we quit the main trail here and swing east a few miles, then cut back to the main trail about ten miles on, we'll miss Long Andy's bushwhackers, Cap'n," he said. His voice was vibrant with some strong inner excitement that showed only in the blue brightness of his eyes.

"Long Andy's laid an ambush?"

"Your damn right . . . I didn't aim to cuss—honest. It sorta slipped. He's got some men and he's layin' for us. A boy at the barn heard Long Andy tell two men that Cap'n Bob Amber's hide was worth more than all the cattle they could steal in a year's time. I didn't say nothin' till we got off to ourse'ves."

"Not even in front of Jake Murphy."

"No, sir. Not even in the hearin' of nobody."

"You'll do, Tad," smiled Bob Amber. "You'll do to take along."

And if it had been lighter Bob would have seen the pleased flush on the boy's tanned face. Tad had been paid the highest compliment a cowman can pay one of his men.

Bob Amber was to learn, many days later, that Tad had saved him from death that first night out of San Angelo when Long Andy Santell and his renegades had laid in deadly ambush along the trail.

They covered fifty miles before sunrise. And three days later they rode into the Diamond W camp on the head of the Pecan Bayou.

A short, thick-shouldered, bowlegged man with white chin whiskers and moustache stained by tobacco, greeted Bob Amber with a string of affectionate profanity, his voice husky with emotion.

"Cap'n Bob, by the eternal hell! I've give you up fer dead so many times in the past years that I'm sidin' with them that say you're bullet proof. You've changed, Bob, in the five years since I laid eyes on yuh. You was bald-faced instead of havin' a growed man's moustache. But as far as I could sight yuh, I knowed yuh by the way you set your hoss—proud an' keerless. Where'd you steal that hoss meat you're a-forkin'?"

Other cowpunchers around the evening campfire greeted Bob Amber, eyeing him with warmth in their grins and something akin to awe in their eyes. For to most of them he was not Captain Bob Amber of Quantrell's cavalry, but the outlaw Bob Amber who had ridden with Frank and Jesse James. They knew him as the man who had been hunted and shot down and thrown into prison and had escaped with a blood-price on his head before the set date for his public hanging.

"Where'd you find the stray yearlin'?" asked the white-whiskered Doc, the trail boss.

"Picked him up at San Angelo. His name's Tad Santell."

"Hell!" said one of the cowpunchers, "That's the button Long Andy Santell had in the saloon, feedin' watered whiskey and makin' him sing some shore smokey verses to the Chisholm Trail song. He's the cause of young Gary bein' shot."

"That's a damn lie!" flared Tad. "I never—"

"Easy, son," said Bob Amber. He looked from the pale-lipped boy to the white-whiskered trail boss.

"I don't know how Gary got shot, nor why. But the boy is all right. His father got killed fightin' for me. I took Tad away from Long Andy. I'm ridin' close herd on him till I get him safely located somewhere. Tad's never had a chance till now. I'm givin' it to him."

"He's a Santell," said the old trail boss, tugging at his white whiskers with a gnarled hand. "From what the boys tell me, it was Long Andy Santell that shot Gary in the back. They'd quarreled about somethin' the boy had said to Gary, when the youngster'd been fed whiskey. Gary

accused Long Andy of puttin' the boy up to sayin' what he didn't have the nerve to say hisself. It ended in Gary bein' shot."

"I'm not blamin' Tad," Bob Amber smiled at the boy who had gotten off his horse and stood beside him, small fists clenched. "And if I don't hold it against the boy, then you men shouldn't."

"Did you ever find out, Bob," said the white-whiskered trail boss, "who set the trap that ketched you and put in prison?"

"No."

"Then it's time you knowed. It was some of the Santell tribe, up in the Strip. This boy's kinfolks."

"And you'd have me take it out on a small boy whose father died fightin' for me. Joe Santell got killed in that fight when they took me. Doc, are you askin' me to send this boy back to Long Andy?"

"Nope." The old trail boss's reply came like a snap of a steel trap. "But we got trouble enough with the Santells without askin' fer more. Packin' this button along up the trail is like havin' a keg of powder in the mess wagon and a slow fuse lighted to it. Long Andy and his damned jayhawkers will trail us like wolves. And we got to pass slap-dab through a strip of No Man's Land where the Santells outnumber us ten to one. But the Diamond W herd belongs to you, Bob. It's all that's left of the outfit you put me in charge of when you rode off to join Quantrell's cavalry. The Mexicans got the rest. I'm just workin' fer you, Bob. Your orders is the only damn laws we're follerin'. Say so, and we'll lay over here on the Pecan Bayou and whup as many Santells as cross the skyline. Doc Buell don't scare easy. My men are drawin' fightin' pay. Give your orders, Bob. We'll take 'em."

This crotchety old cowhand had helped raise Bob and Gary Amber when Colonel Amber moved from Kentucky to Texas. Colonel Amber had hired Doc Buell when he'd bought the Diamond W ranch on the Mexican border near Del Rio, on the Rio Grande. Winters, Bob and young Gary had gone to military school in Kentucky and Virginia. Their vacations had been spent on the ranch. The Civil war had taken Colonel Amber at Shiloh. Bob had left the ranch and young Gary in Doc Buell's care and ridden off to join Quantrell. Old Doc was like Bob's own father in his affections. Doc had just about worshipped young Gary.

"We'll take care of Long Andy Santell and his renegade jayhawkers!" smiled Bob Amber. "And if young Tad's a powder

WORLD'S MOST POPULAR LAXATIVE NOW SCIENTIFICALLY IMPROVED!

Ex-Lax now better than ever!

People everywhere are praising the new Scientifically Improved Ex-Lax! Thousands have written glowing letters telling of their own experiences with this remarkable laxative.

"I always liked the taste of Ex-Lax," many said, "but now it's even *more* delicious!"..."It certainly gives you a thorough cleaning out!" was another popular comment..."We never dreamed that any laxative could be so gentle!" hundreds wrote.

And right they are! Always pleasant—always effective—always kind to sensitive systems—Ex-Lax today offers all of these advantages in even *greater* measure! It's a more satisfactory and efficient laxative in every way!

If you are suffering from headaches, biliousness, listlessness or any of the other ailments so often caused by constipation—you'll feel better after taking Ex-Lax.

Your druggist has the new Scientifically Improved Ex-Lax in 10c and 25c sizes. *The box is the same as always—but the contents are better than ever! Get a box today!*

EX-LAX NOW TASTES BETTER THAN EVER!

Ex-Lax now has a smoother, richer chocolate flavor—tastes like a choice confection! You'll like it *even better* than you did before.

EX-LAX NOW ACTS BETTER THAN EVER!

Ex-Lax is now even more effective than it used to be. Empties the bowels *more thoroughly, more smoothly,* in less time than before.

EX-LAX NOW MORE GENTLE THAN EVER!

Ex-Lax now has a milder and more comfortable action. Kind to sensitive systems. No shock, no violence, no nausea!

keg in the mess wagon, just what description fits me—with a price on my head that every man in the Strip would risk his neck to collect? The boy stays with me, regardless. And it might be that neither of us will be traveling with the trail herd a part of the time. Tad, shake hands with Doc Buell. His growl's worse than his bite."

"I'd rather cut my string right here and now, Cap'n Bob," said the boy solemnly, "I ain't stayin' where I ain't wanted."

"Hold on there, young feller," growled Doc, his horny hand dropping like a clamp on Tad's shoulder. "I need a hoss jingler plumb bad. Pull the hull off that dun pony and surround some grub. You look ga'nted. The cook will git the wrinkles outa your belly before you're an hour older. Boys, take care of the button. Me'n Bob is goin' to ketch up on our augerin'. He might be Cap'n Bob Amber to some folks, but to me he's just a long-legged button no bigger'n Tad there that was underfoot every time a man turned quick."

WHILE the cook and the Diamond W cowpunchers took care of Tad, Bob Amber unsaddled his horse and walked over with Doc to sit on the tongue of the bed-wagon. He gave the old trail boss the bottle of whiskey that had been Jake Murphy's parting gift. They had a drink together. Doc smacked his lips and hid the bottle in his bedroll.

They talked until dusk, when the horse wrangler brought in the remuda. The herd was lying over that day on Pecan Bayou to water and get the benefit of the good feed there. Half the men were in camp, shoeing horses and doing odd chores. They would catch their night horses now, and the men listed for cocktail guard rode out to relieve the cowboys on day herd. Tad was making himself useful, carrying water for the cook and splitting wood, gathering dried buffalo chips to fill the cooney, or dried hide fastened under the bed-wagon for a carry-all. The cranky old round-up cook, Greasy George, had taken to Tad and was bullying him and mothering him and telling the boy his trials and tribulations as a trail cook.

"What you aimin' to do with the button, Bob?" asked Doc.

"I don't know, for certain. His mother's folks are army people—Yanks. His granddaddy is Major Macklin and he's stationed, like as not, at Fort Scott. Macklin's as hard as steel and one of the finest cavalry officers in the Yankee army. But discipline of the right kind won't hurt the boy. Long Andy taught him all the ornery tricks in the book. Macklin might put him in a military school. Good trainin' for a boy, Doc. And it would be a home for him. I'm in no position to take care of him. I'm on the dodge. Sooner or later I'll be shot down for the price the government has put on my head. I'm living on borrowed time." Bob Amber's eyes were hard, his voice brittle with bitterness.

"Wasn't it soldiers that shot you all to hell and got you throwed in the pen?"

"A detachment of Macklin's cavalry from Fort Scott, sent out on a *pasear* to round up some renegade Injuns. Joe Santell and I were headed south for Texas. We'd camped on the Arkansas River when they rode up on us. Opened up on us without warnin'. They'd killed Joe and captured me. Macklin had given orders to shoot us on sight. Joe never told me he'd run off with Macklin's daughter. We'd met some of Joe's jayhawker cousins a few days before. Now that I think back, it could have been some of them that sic'd the soldiers on us. Joe didn't cotton to 'em strong. Didn't like 'em or trust 'em any more than I did."

"They sold you out, Bob," said the white-bearded trail boss. "I've heard it before. This ain't a safe country for you. Kansas and Oklahoma and Missouri is lousy with jayhawkers that'd sell out their own grandmother for a jug of bad likker.

If you go up with the herd it'll lessen our chances of ever reachin' Montana with these Diamond W steers. It's bad enough as it is, with rustlers and renegade Injuns tryin' to stampede the herd of a night. If them damned soldiers start chasin' us around tryin' to gather your hide, it'll be all the worse. Not only that. But if the news ever gits to Macklin that the Diamond W iron and every horse and steer in that iron belongs to Bob Amber, he'll confiscate it. Shore as hell, Bob, he'll grab this outfit, lock, stock and barrel!"

Bob Amber nodded. "I know. I'm givin' you a bill of sale for the outfit, Doc—cattle, horses, wagons. You own the Diamond W iron. I'll have the papers drawn up legal and proper when we reach Albany. And in case anything should happen to me, you take care of young Tad. I didn't aim to go up the trail with you. Until I got the news Gary had been killed, my only aim was to see him for a few days, then pull out. You see, Doc, I have my own game to play out till the last white chip is bet and gathered in. Chances are a thousand to one I'll lose. But I'll take that one slim chance and I'll go out fightin'."

"You're joinin' the James boys?"

"No. I never played their game. You don't have to believe me, but it's the truth. I never robbed a bank or held up a stage coach or train. Never stole a dollar of any man's money. Joe and I and a few picked men made our war on the damned jayhawkers and carpet baggers, who were raiding helpless people, mistreating their women an' murdering the men. We killed those looters where we found 'em. But the law never gave me a chance to prove that. I got a drum-head court martial, a semi-military trial. My defense counsel was so drunk he had to be helped into the court room. There was a jug planted in the jury room. Major Macklin was off on an Indian campaign or I'd have gotten a decent trial. I'm no outlaw, Doc. Jesse and Frank James are my friends. I camped with them often. But our ideas differed on outlawry so they never asked me to join 'em. I never rode with 'em on one of their raids. Joe Santell and I rode alone mostly. Sometimes we picked up men to help us if the odds were too big. But I'm no bank robber or road-agent."

"I kin believe that. But kin you make Macklin and his Yankee gover'ment think thataway?"

"That," smiled Bob Amber, "is what I hope to do. Unless I'm cut down by the bounty hunters."

They got to their feet as the wrangler hazed the remuda into the corral.

"Go easy on the button, Doc," said Bob. "I know how you feel about Gary. But it ain't Tad's fault."

The old trail boss nodded, tugging at his chin whiskers. He spoke to the horse wrangler who had corraled the remuda. "You kin saddle your private hoss and pull out, mister. I got a hoss jingler that kin put taller on them ponies where you bin knockin' it off. And he won't be losin' ary hosses of a night, neither."

The man swung his long frame to the ground. "You'll play hell findin' ary man that'll wrangle hosses of a day and nighthawk 'em to boot! A man 'ud think I spilled your cavvy a-purpose. I lost a couple head of a stormy night an'—" He stopped short, his long jaw dropped open. His pale, bloodshot eyes stared at Tad.

"H'are yuh, Sid," said Tad. "Long time no see you." The boy looked up at Bob Amber. "Sid Santell's another shirt-tail cousin. He belongs in the Strip."

"The hell he does!" Old Doc's white chin whiskers quivered. "Told me his name was Ed Green and he'd never bin north of the San Saba till this trip. The lyin' young whelp!"

DOC BUELL had his catch-rope in his hand. Two strides of his bowed legs took him within arm's length of the lanky

young horse wrangler. The coiled rope in his hand swung swiftly. It caught Sid Santell across the eyes and mouth and nose.

A hard twist Mexican hemp rope can be a painful weapon. Its doubled loop whipped the man across the face half a dozen times, sending him reeling backwards, half blinding him, smashing his loose lipped mouth to a bloody pulp.

The old trail boss's fury was terrific. The knotted hondo struck the man behind the ear and he dropped like a beef knocked in the head.

"He lost four head of good horses when we was camped back on the North Concho near San Angelo," snapped Doc. "Lost 'em to the Santells. The jayhawkin' son will travel afoot from here. When he comes alive, a couple of you boys ride with him a few miles, then set him afoot and whup him with your ropes till he hits a lope. Whup him till he can't travel no fu'ther. Then let him lay where he falls. He'll make it by hand to his coyote kin, somehow—I'm obliged, Tad."

"Keep the change," mumbled Tad, a little confused by the trail boss's thanks. "Sid's ornery. He cut a man's head off once with a butcher knife."

Old Doc chuckled and pointed to a fleabitten gray horse. "Ketch that 'un for a night horse, Tad. He's in the wrangler's string. Stake him out where the feed's good. Unless somethin' turns up, you won't need him tonight. Tomorrow you kin grab some sleep after the wagons move to the next camp. And tomorrow night you kin nighthawk 'em."

"I'd ruther start tonight. I don't need much sleep—hardly any. I ain't big enough to git lazy, I reckon. I'd ruther nighthawk 'em startin' now."

"Suit yourself," said Doc. Bob smiled faintly.

Tad slid a loop in his saddle rope. The little fleabitten gray was on the outside edge of the remuda that filled the corral. A flip of the rope upward and the small loop caught the gray's head neatly.

It was a catch that any old, experienced hand might have been proud of. But the boy took it as a matter of course and did not even look around for signs of approval. He walked down the rope, coiling it easily, slipped the loop up higher on the horse's neck, and led the animal out of the corral to where his saddle lay on the ground.

Bob Amber looked at Doc and grinned. Doc nodded, his puckered eyes twinkling. Then walked over to where Sid Santell was getting to his feet, wiping blood from his rope-battered face.

"Take word back to Long Andy," said Doc, "that young Tad is workin' for the Diamond W. Tell him that if any of your dirty jayhawker tribe try to bother the button, we'll wipe the whole smear of you out like we'd kill so many hydrophoby skunks. Young Tad Santell is in the Diamond W iron, fer keeps. Now saddle your hoss and pull out. The next time I sight you, I'll gut-shoot yuh!"

Tad, saddling the little gray, looked at Bob Amber who had roped a horse and led it out to his saddle near the boy's.

"Did you hear what Doc said to Sid, Cap'n? I'm a Diamond W man!"

"That's the size of it, partner."

"I come in handy, spottin' Sid," he said, pulling the latigo through the cinch ring and not looking up from his work.

Bob suppressed a grin. "You're makin' a hand, more ways than one."

"I'm kinda strong for my age. And tough enough so's I don't need hardly any sleep ner grub. I never nighthawked, but I'll keep a count on 'em durin' the night, every hour or so. I kin tell more about which 'uns is leaders and wanders off after tonight. Is there a place called Pecan Corrals near here?"

"Not more than ten miles along the Bayou. A corral and pasture fenced off

there. It's off the main trail and the trail outfits never use it. It's used now and then at odd times by renegades that want to keep out of sight. Why?"

"I've heard Long Andy talk about it. Cousin Jep stops there on his way to the Strip. Tell Doc not to let Sid ride that direction."

Sid Santell had saddled his private horse and mounted. Doc tolled off two men to ride with him.

"See that he don't head for Pecan Corrals," said Bob.

The battered Sid gave him a quick, hard look. He started to say something and then changed his mind. The two men, doubled ropes swinging, rode on either side of the man as he left camp at a lope.

They saw Tad drift the remuda off into the gathering dusk then Bob rode out to the herd with Doc. Doc was sending out a man to nighthawk later on, in a few hours, to relieve the boy and give him a chance to sleep.

The night was cool and calm, with a moon two thirds round. The herd lay on the bedground as if rooted there. Off in the distance came the jingle of bells on the several horses that were leaders and inclined to wander of a night.

Bob stayed out at the herd until nearly midnight. Then he rode past the remuda on his way back to camp. The man who was nighthawking said that Tad had been relieved at ten o'clock. Bob nodded and went on to camp. The boy needed a good night's sleep.

But Tad was not in the tarp bed Doc had given him. Nor was his night horse staked out. Tad had not come back.

CHAPTER THREE

Outcast of the Thundering Trails

BOB AMBER didn't want to wake old Doc or the other cowpunchers, but he was thoroughly alarmed by the boy's disappearance. For in spite of Doc's acceptance of him, and the way the men had treated him, it was like young Tad to feel that he wasn't wanted. There had been that unfortunate accusation when they'd ridden up to camp when one man had said Tad was to blame for Gary's killing. Tad wasn't forgetting. The boy was too close-mouthed to refer to it, and too well trained by Long Andy to divulge any plan he might have about running off. And Bob Amber was convinced that young Tad had hit the trail.

Then there was the possibility that the vindictive Sid, set afoot several miles from camp, had sneaked back, waylaid Tad, killed him, then stolen the boy's horse and made a getaway.

Bob spent an hour or two riding over the country between camp and the remuda. He rode back to the herd, but the boy wasn't there and the men on guard said they'd seen nothing of him.

Bob circled the camp again and again, riding in a wider swing each time. It was nearly daybreak when he met Doc on his way from camp to the bedded herd.

"He's run off, Doc—or Sid Santell got him."

"Can't do much till daylight, Bob. Go on to camp and bed down. Come light, we'll hunt the button."

Bob Amber rode on to camp and unsaddled. He pulled off his boots and lay down, but sleep wouldn't come.

He was waiting at the corral in the first gray of dawn when the sound of horse bells heralded the approach of the remuda. And in the dim light he saw the horse cavvy come in sight, blurred blots moving in the uncertain light. Three riders were coming with the horses—the nighthawk who had taken Tad's place, Doc, swinging the leaders towards the corral, and then on the far side, a small figure on a gray horse. It was Tad.

Bob Amber didn't know whether to

laugh or cuss. Where had the boy been hiding out? Why?

The answer came from old Doc Buell. As the remuda was hazed into the corral the old trail boss rode up to where Bob was standing and dismounted.

"Well, Bob, did you git a count on the horses as they come in?"

Bob shook his head. Doc chuckled.

"You'd have counted fourteen head more than left the corral last night. The Tad button will do fer a nighthawk anywhere along the trail. He finds the four head that was spilled back on the North Concho ten days ago. And fetches along ten head more fer good measure. Says he picked 'em up at the Pecan Corrals, where his cousin Jep had 'em cached. Better talk to him, Bob. He's that swelled up with pride he won't admit, that he'll blow up, shore, if he don't let off steam. The li'l' ol' hoss thief! I'm drawin' the cork on that bottle. I shore need a big 'un."

NO DOUBT young Tad's heart was thumping hard when Bob spoke to him. He was trying to suppress his elation and pride. His eyes were like sapphire lights as he hooked a stirrup over the saddle horn and commenced unsaddling.

"You had me worried, button. I thought you'd run off, or that Sid Santell had slipped back and got hold of you . . . Let's have a look at you, son. Where'd that blood on your shirt come from? You're hurt!"

"No, sir—just my hide nicked. And one bullet cut a hole in my hat. There was Jep and Hon and two more at Pecan Corrals. Then Sid come afoot. They had a jug there, and all of 'em drunk. I slipped up on the cabin and listened. They shore lit into Sid a-plenty. And while they was a-janglin' amongst theirse'ves, I set 'em afoot. They fogged me up some but they was too drunk and the range too far, and they didn't do me no harm. The five of 'em is plumb afoot. From what I heard when I was listenin' outside the cabin, they aimed to have Sid drift the remuda to Pecan Corrals last night and set the Diamond W afoot. They'd have had that cavvy forty miles away by now if Doc Buell hadn't run Sid off."

Doc had overheard the boy's conversation with Bob. His big hand was on Tad's shoulder as Bob examined the bullet furrow in the youngster's arm.

"If Tad don't do another lick of work the rest of the way up the trail," said Doc "he's earned his pay. Bob, Tad shore enough belongs in the Diamond W iron."

Greasy George took charge of dressing Tad's bullet wound, using a clean flour-sack dishtowel and ripping it into bandages. He was feeding the boy a whole dried apple pie in lieu of anaesthetic.

"There's trouble comin'," Bob told Doc Buell. "The Santells have had their eye on the Diamond W herd from the time it left Del Rio. From here on till we cross the Arkansas at Dodge City, we're in dangerous territory. Santells and other renegades ride the country between here and the Red River, from the Red to the Canadian and on to the Cimarron. But once we cross the Cimarron they ain't so bad, and the nearer we get to the Arkansas the more scared they'll be about botherin' us, because Macklin's cavalry are patrolin' that strip right now, due to Indian trouble. If we can make it to the Cimarron we'll be all right. But until we cross the Cimarron, the Santells are goin' to try their damndest to steal this herd. You're short-handed, Doc."

Old Doc Buell nodded. "Some of my men quit me cold back at San Angelo. That dad-blamed Long Andy Santell throwed a scare into 'em. Damn tootin' I'm short-handed."

"I'm leavin' Tad with you for a few days. By the time they get organized with another plan of attack I'll be back, and I won't be alone. Moreover, the boys I'll have with me won't be scared."

"Some of the James gang, you mean?"

"Ask me no questions, you old warthog, and I'll tell you no fairy tales. I'll get this trail herd to Dodge City!"

* * *

BOB AMBER rode up boldly on the four men camped at Sweetwater Spring. Ignoring their drawn guns, he rode out of the shadows of gathering dusk and into the rim of firelight.

"It's Bob Amber," said one of the four, putting up his gun. "Cap'n Bob hisself! Light and rest your saddle."

Bob unsaddled and hobbled his horse, then joined the four. He filled a tin cup with black coffee, blew on it to cool its steaming surface, and smiled thinly.

"Didn't expect you, Bob," said a black-bearded man with cold blue eyes. "Changed your mind about joinin' us?"

"Picked a bad time, if he did," said another, grinning. "We just cleaned out a bank and a gamblin' house at Austin. Got ourselves enough gold to live the life of Riley for a few weeks. We're camped here to de-vide the jackpot and head for the town lights of Albany or Albilene. You didn't take no part in the job, Bob, but one of the boys died of lead poison and you're plumb welcome to his fifth cut of the jackpot. Ain't that right, boys?"

"You'll never be righter," said another. They all nodded. They had dumped gold and banknotes from a gunnysack onto a saddle blanket.

"I had a job in mind for you boys," said Bob, "Honest cow work with some fightin' to spice it. Good pay and profit from the Nueces Pool herd. But it looks like you're too rich to bother."

"Hold on, Cap," said the black-bearded man, "What's that about the Nueces Pool herd? Thought your iron was the Diamond W."

"It is. The Nueces Pool stuff belongs to the Santells."

"Did you say honest work, Bob?"

"As honest as the other jobs you've done with me. Takin' from robbers is no crime in my book."

"Long Andy Santell," mused the black-bearded man aloud, puffing his cob pipe until the billowing smoke of the home-cured natural leaf tobacco curtained his hard blue eyes, "Hon Santell, an' One-eyed Jepp. All right, Bob, I'm your huckleberry, Cap. Just from what I heard Joe Santell tell about his jayhawker kinfolks, I'd like a crack at 'em. We kin spend this gold later. Give the orders and we'll take 'em into hell's last burnin' pit."

"Thanks," said Bob Amber. "It's only fair to tell you that it's almighty dangerous."

"If it was safe and quiet, Cap, we wouldn't care much about doin' the chore. Fightin' to us boys is like likker to a drunkard. When do we start?"

"We'll head for the Nueces Pool camp in the mornin'. Ketch 'em just before they reach Pecan Bayou where the Diamond W herd is layin' over. Long Andy is roddin' the Nueces outfit. There'll be twelve-fifteen of the Santells and the ornery snakes that work with 'em. We'll ride there peaceful. We're reppin' for Tad Santell, sabe?"

"No sabe. Who is Tad Santell?"

"Joe's kid. He's got about a hundred head of steers in the JS iron with the Pool herd. We're holdin' up the Nueces herd to cut Tad's stuff. I'll tell you about young Tad after I take on some grub."

Bob Amber told them about young Tad. And before his story was done these four bearded, cold-eyed, hard-riding outlaws were ready to fight for the boy who was the son of their old cavalry comrade.

IT WAS between dusk and nightfall the next day when Bob Amber and his four men rode up to the campfire of the Nueces Pool. Long Andy was not among the armed, suspicious-eyed men who greeted them in silence, hands on their

guns. Bob counted seven men at the fire.

"Who's boss of this outfit?" asked Bob.

"Long Andy Santell ain't here. I'll do to talk to, mister. Who in hell are you and what's your business? You're talkin' to Hon Santell."

"I'm Bob Amber. I've come to cut Tad Santell's JS steers. If you make a fuss about it, I'll take your whole Pool herd.!"

The Nueces men were on foot, Bob and his four men mounted. As Hon Santell's gun slid from its holster, spitting fire, Bob jumped his horse sideways, shooting at the same instant. His bullet caught the tall, rawboned Hon in his gun arm.

The fight was short, deadly and swift-paced. Guns roared, their crimson and yellow flames stabbing the shadows. The din was terrific. Horses were jumping and lunging and men on foot were running for the shelter of trees along the bank of the small river. Two of the Nueces men were on the ground, dead or dying. A couple more vaulted into their saddles and were racing for the herd that was being bedded down half a mile away. Hon Santell, his gun arm broken, had jerked a second six-shooter as the other slid from his useless right hand. He leaped on his horse, heading for the herd. The night's shadows swallowed him. Bob let him go.

"We'll stampede the herd and run it north. Keep it bunched if we can. We'll lose some cattle but we'll have enough left over to make a good tally. Come on!"

They charged, shouting the wild guerilla Rebel yell. Luck favored them. The restless longhorn steers, already on their feet, spooked by the shooting at camp, further frightened by the shouting of Hon and the other man who raced for the herd, were moving when Bob and his men came up out of the gathering darkness, yelling and shooting. Five minutes ago a bedded herd had been settling down for the night. Now more than two thousand head of longhorn steers were running northward. The thunder of their hoofs shook the ground like an earthquake. The Nueces Pool men scattered, each man for himself. Guns spewed flame in the darkness.

No army of a hundred cowboys could have halted that cattle run. Bob Amber and his men, all top cowhands, satisfied to let the steers run, devoted that next hour or so to fighting. When they rode up on a Nueces Pool man, they shot to kill. And they were all crack shots.

It was the sort of fighting they had been accustomed to, and they made no mistakes. Hon, wounded and bewildered by pain and the suddenness of it all, had no time to rally his men for resistance. They had scattered when they heard that Rebel yell.

Bob and one of his men had, by prearranged plan, located the Pool remuda. And before the two men on nighthawk duty could get the horses scattered, Bob and his hard riding companion had gathered probably twenty head and had hazed the running horses off into the night, following the wake of the stampeded herd.

Two hours later the herd, traveling at a shuffling, bawling walk, with a cavvy of about twenty head of horses, neared the Diamond W camp on the Pecan Bayou. Bob rode on ahead. He met old Doc and two of his men, riding to investigate the bawling cattle they'd heard.

"I got some cattle for you, Doc. They belong to Tad. Anyhow that's what my boys tell me. Too dark to get even a rough count but they'll tally well over a thousand head. We gathered 'em for the button. How's he gettin' along? It's ten days or more since I saw him. Had a time locatin' my men. Got here as soon as . . . What's wrong, Doc?"

"Tad's gone, Bob! Long Andy Santell taken him."

"You mean you let that murderin' snake—?"

"He had the sheriff from Albany with

him, and a posse of law deputies to back the play. Long Andy Santell is the Tad boy's legal guardeen in Texas. There wasn't a thing I could do, Bob. You can't go fightin' the law. The marshal of Albany had papers fer the boy, and a bench warrant fer you. They taken the Tad boy to Albany. If there had bin a way to keep 'em from takin' Tad, I'd used it. But it was the Texas law that had taken him away. There'll be a court hearin' at Albany on Monday mornin' when Tad will go before the judge to be turned over, legal and proper, to Long Andy Santell again. There ain't a thing you kin do about it."

Bob Amber's mouth was a grim hard line under his drooping black moustache. He bit back the bitter words of reproach he'd been about to turn loose on the old trail boss.

"Send some men out to take the Nueces Pool steers, Doc," he said quietly. "My men are about tuckered out, and two of 'em got shot up a little. We left some Santells behind us that won't ever bother the Diamond W outfit again."

"What in hell, Bob, you bin up to? You can't git away with it. Long Andy will have the law on top of us."

"Meanin' the marshal of Albany? He's one of the Santell tribe. Goes under the name of Herb Harper. You let that tin star he hides behind bluff you, Doc. Send the boys back for the Nueces Pool cattle. I got a faster job for my men—one that they know how to handle!"

"Gawdamighty, Bob, go keerful!" rasped old Doc Buell. "You can't git away with takin' them steers. It's high-handed rustlin'!"

Bob Amber grinned. "Old age shore does slow some men down. Ten years ago, Doc Buell would have ridden a hundred miles out of his way to lift that Nueces herd. I'll ease your conscience when I get back from Albany with a legal bill of sale for all stock in the Nueces Pool road iron."

CHAPTER FOUR

When Trail Wolves Strike

FROM the Diamond W camp on Pecan Bayou to the cowtown of Albany was a distance of about fifty miles. Bob Amber and his four men, traveling at a long, steady road trot, could make it by sunrise or a little later, if nothing delayed them. And Bob Amber, thinking of the boy Tad who had taken a place in his heart, told himself that nothing was going to slow their progress along the trail. They had been traveling three or four hours at the steady ground-covering trot when Bob pulled up, listening.

Off to the eastward came the faint sound of gunfire. Bob scowled, his ears strained, his nerves tense.

"What do you make of it, Cap?" asked the black-bearded man called Shag.

"Your guess is as good as mine," said Bob. "The Chisholm Trail lays to the eastward more than a hundred miles. Renegade Indians and whites have been raiding the herds before they reached Fort Worth, and drivin' stolen cattle and horses to Albany. It might mean that the trail drovers have caught up with the rustlers and are shootin' it out with 'em. Or it might mean that Long Andy never took Tad to Albany but swung off there to the east with some of his men and they've gotten into a tight with the law or with other renegades. We'll swing off in that direction."

Without increasing their road trot to a faster gait, they headed in the direction of the shooting that, for probably twenty minutes, sounded like a pitched battle. Then the glow of a fire showed ahead.

"If this was on the main trail," said Bob, "and further into the Injun country, I'd say that a war party of renegade

Injuns had attacked a small wagon train. What do you make of it, Shag?"

"Burnin' wagon, Cap. And yonder comes some of the—"

"Scatter, men. Deploy. Flank 'em and close in. . . . Never mind, there's only two of 'em. Ride to meet 'em. Shag, those two men ride like blue-coated soldiers!"

Bob stood in his stirrups, hailing the two riders who reined up when they sighted them. "Ride forward, you two soldiers!" he shouted. "Nobody's goin' to shoot you! What's your trouble? What's that fire behind you?"

The two soldiers rode forward warily, their guns in their hands. One of them had been wounded in the head and was reeling in the saddle, his face bloody.

"If you're white men with a drop of decent blood in your veins," croaked the wounded soldier, "get there as fast as God'll let you. Two white women are at the mercy of that dirty pack of mongrels. We gave 'em a fight, outnumbered five to one. Lieutenant Cole was shot through the head and killed when he wouldn't surrender. No time to tell you. If you're white men, get there before it's too late."

Bob touched his horse with the spurs. "Come on, men!" he called back across his shoulder as he spurred to a run.

Bob Amber's men knew what to do. He didn't give a single order as they rode within gunshot range of the burning wagon with its two women and three soldiers, barricaded behind the carcasses of dead mules and horses, putting up a desperate, hopeless defense against the half score attackers who surrounded them.

With the wild rebel yell bursting from their throats, Bob Amber and his men charged. Their guns spat fire as they rode down at a run on the scattered circle of attackers.

Surprised and bewildered by the unexpected attack from the rear, warned by that wild Guerilla yell that carried death in its echoes, the renegades took to their horses. Bob's men wasted few bullets.

The fight was over within a few minutes. Bob Amber, his hat in his hand, rode up to where two frightened women crouched behind the carcasses of the dead mules that had drawn the covered army ambulance.

One of the women was stout, with hair as white as silver. In her right hand was a big army revolver.

The younger woman, in tailored black riding habit, had a mass of dark bronze hair that was in tumbled disorder around the most beautiful face Bob reckoned he had ever seen. Her reddish brown eyes were wide with terror, but she tried to smile. The cavalry carbine looked big and heavy in her small hands. Bob smiled at her, bowed stiffly in his saddle, and swung to the ground. He addressed his words to the older woman. "You won't need your gun any more, ma'am. We'll give you a safe escort to Albany."

The white-haired woman nodded. Her dark eyes were a little glazed from fright and desperation. "I intended to use the first bullet on Molly," she said in a mechanical tone. "The second for myself. That one-eyed beast. . . ." She shuddered, her voice cracking into a sob.

BOB took the gun from her hand and supported her with his other arm. Shag produced a battered canteen.

"It's good corn likker, Cap," he mumbled, "Don't waste none."

Bob made the woman swallow some of the fiery stuff. He saw that the girl was kneeling beside the dead body of a blue-coated soldier, her white hand stained with the dead man's blood as she tried to cover the bullet-torn forehead with her handkerchief.

Bob turned the older woman over to Shag and went to the girl. He took his own dusty silk neckscarf and covered the dead man's face. The girl's eyes were

dry of tears, her face ghastly white. He put his arm across her shoulder and made her drink from Shag's whiskey canteen.

"We were on our way from Fort Worth to Albany," she said. "To be married. That one-eyed man and the others with him were drunk. He got abusive and insulting. When Charles—Lieutenant Cole—resented the man's vile language, that one-eyed beast shot him without warning. Sergeant Hull and his men did their best. But they were outnumbered. You've saved my life and the life of my aunt. My father, Major Macklin, will repay you. . . ."

The girl's voice faded into silence, and Bob Amber felt her go limp.

The older woman came up. "She's fainted," she said briskly, "and small wonder! The trip's been enough to try the nerves of even an old army nurse like myself. Hugh Macklin was an idiot to let her start with Lieutenant Cole, so fresh from West Point that he wasn't dry behind the ears, a Q.M. sergeant and eight soldiers for an escort. They've been lost since we got out of sight of the fort. If Charles had only shot that one-eyed renegade when he rode up. . . . But it's not for the likes of me to malign the dead or countermand the Major's orders. I'll take another nip of that whiskey. My legs are wobbly. As that man says, it's good corn whiskey and used as medicine, never hurt anybody. Water's what Molly needs. . . . Thanks." She took a big army canteen that Shag offered her and bathed the girl's face and eyes with a dampened handkerchief.

The color had come back into the older woman's cheeks, giving her face the ruddy, tanned glow of health. Instinctively Bob Amber warmed to this silvery-haired, capable woman.

The girl's eyes opened. Bob, squatting on his spurred boot heels, supporting her head and shoulders, nodded at the army nurse as she bent over the girl.

"Take a good swallow, Molly. This is whiskey, not water, and goodness knows you need it. . . . That's it." She corked the canteen and returned it to Shag.

"I'm Anne Macklin," she said in her crisp voice, "sister of Major Hugh Macklin. This is Major Macklin's daughter Molly. I've seen you before, young man, somewhere."

"In the army hospital at Fort Scott," said Bob. "You were head nurse there. I saw you only once or twice before you left for another hospital. My name is Bob Amber."

The woman's dark eyes looked steadily into his. She held out her hand.

"We're in your debt, Captain Amber —Molly and I. And so is my brother Hugh. I'm not ashamed to tell you that I wept a few tears of joy when I heard that you'd escaped. I'm doubly glad now that those idiots didn't hang you." She

YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD STORE NOW
HAS THIS AMAZING NEW WATCH

A sensation in every way! Jeweled movement! Beautiful chrome-finished curved case. Handsome leather strap or adjustable metal band. Guaranteed. But be *sure* to look for this name on the dial.

Ingersoll

turned to the girl. "Molly, this is the Captain Bob Amber, of Quantrell's Cavalry, I told you about—an officer of the Confederate army, and a gentleman! His only fault is that he was too hot-headed and proud to admit the war was over. They were going to hang him because he wiped out some of the worst scoundrels that ever went unhung. The only real quarrels I ever had with Hugh were over Captain Bob Amber and over your older sister, Molly. Perhaps this will convince your father that Bob Amber is not the blackguard they'd like to paint him. Pull yourself together, child, and act like an army girl instead of a timid little pilgrim schoolmarm. The man won't bite you. If it's another swallow of that Dutch courage you need, why, whiskey has its uses, Captain Amber! Thanks! Swallow, you little ninny!"

More than one soldier of the Confederate army had carried home great tales of Nurse Anne Macklin. Her name was spoken in the prayers of more than a few women of the South whose husbands and brothers, lovers or fathers had been nursed back to life by her capable hands.

And before they reached Albany Bob Amber could well understand why men spoke the name of Anne Macklin with a sort of hushed reverence. . . .

IT WAS nearing noon when they halted at the edge of town. Anne Macklin had ridden horseback with Molly and Bob. The body of Lieutenant Cole was being brought, tarpaulin wrapped, lashed to his saddle, by the three soldiers who had buried their dead comrades.

Bob Amber had told Nurse Anne Macklin and Molly about young Tad, and about Joe Santell, Tad's father.

"This mornin' at the Albany court house," said Bob, "the judge was to give Tad back to Long Andy. I'm afraid I'm gettin' there too late to prevent it. But regardless of courts and legal papers, I'm takin' Tad away from that renegade!"

Anne Macklin nodded. "Hugh disowned Nancy when she ran off with Joe Santell. He had other plans for her—selfish, stubborn plans to marry her to a stuffy major old enough to be her father. Just like he was making this army match for Molly . . . Don't gasp, young lady. Truth's truth, and you've left tear stains on every pillow your head's rested on in weeks! Poor Charles was a good boy and an obedient son and stiff-backed from West Point drills and parades. He's dead now, and God rest his poor young soul . . . where was I? Oh, yes. Tad—Nancy's Tad."

Anne Macklin's generous mouth tightened and sparks showed in her dark eyes. "Captain Bob, can you trust me?"

"With my life or honor or my best horse, ma'am," Bob smiled.

"Splendid! Then you and your men stay clear of Albany. Hide out somewhere. Hugh is back at Fort Worth and won't be along for a few days. But the father of poor Charles is Judge Cole of Albany. I'll get legal custody of Tad Santell or know the reason why not. If I need help, I'll get word to you. Isn't that a wiser plan? There's a price on your head that will have every sharpshooter in Albany sniping at you from windows and doorways. Soldiers have orders to arrest you on sight and kill you if you resist. You're listed on the same reward dodgers with Frank and Jesse James. You can't ride into Albany in broad daylight and expect to gain anything but a lot of bullets in your system. Can you trust me to rescue Tad?"

"I was goin' to suggest that you do somethin' of the sort, ma'am."

"Then we'll part company here. Molly and I will ride on into town by ourselves. How will I be able to get in touch with you?"

"I'll tend to that," said Bob. "I have friends in Albany, as well as enemies."

Bob Amber rode his horse alongside Molly's. The drawn whiteness had left her face. There were dark circles under her eyes but the color of her cheeks was warm and sun-tanned, flushed faintly now as he held her hand.

"There's a price on my head," he said in a low tone as Anne Macklin deliberately rode off, leaving them alone. "I hope to be free of it, some day. When I am, I want to find you again. I wish you could tell me you'd welcome me."

"I haven't thanked you yet for saving my life," she said gravely. "Shall I wait until another time?"

"Your father calls me a murderer and a blackguard and other names."

She smiled. "You've heard Aunt Anne say that my father has been known to make mistakes."

"Then you don't believe the stories they tell about Bob Amber?"

"Only the ones Aunt Anne tells me."

For a moment laughter broke through the depth of her eyes. Impulsively Bob leaned from his saddle and kissed her while the smile was still on her lips. Then reined his horse and rode at a lope back to where his men waited. He turned in his saddle and waved his hat. Molly Macklin's arm raised in reply.

"You'll come to my weddin'," he grinned at Shag and the others as they rode off.

"You shore don't lose time declarin' yourself, Cap. And her the daughter of that fire-eatin', snortin' Yank that swore that shootin' was too damned good fer Quantrell and his men! Steal that ol' hoss's daughter, Cap, and I'll buy the finest weddin' present you.kin pick out. If I could do my own choosin', I'd hand you Hugh Macklin's carcass boiled in snake oil. With all the South to pick from, you got to git mooney over the daughter of the damndest Yankee dog-robbin' son that ever protected a carpetbagger gover'ment. But I don't blame yuh. I'll kiss a pig if she ain't shore the purtiest gal that ever set a horse sidesaddle!"

Bob grinned. "We'll hide out on the edge of town till dark. Get the news about Tad and play the cards that are dealt us. Anne Macklin is going to get legal custody of Tad!"

"Mebby," grunted the black-bearded Shag. "But mostly, mebby not. And supposin' she does git a paper that gives her legal right to the button? This mornin', while we was rescuin' ladies in distress, Judge Cole give the boy into the legal keepin' of Long Andy. And it ain't noways likely that Long Andy is wastin' time in town when he's got a trail herd back yonder. A female woman packin' a paper with a judge's seal on it ain't gittin' Tad away from that long geared he-wolf. Better let one of us boys slip into town and smell out what's what. Nobody'll pay no never-mind to one of us around the saloons. Slim there ain't known in Albany. Lemme have Slim go into town fer a jug. Eh, boys?"

"That's my notion," said Slim, wetting his lips with a tobacco-stained tongue. "The last in Shag's canteen tasted like more. Lemme slide into town while you boys hole up somewheres."

Bob, worried more than he cared to admit, feeling guilty and disloyal to the boy who trusted him, nodded consent. "We'll be at Sloan's Barn, yonder," he said. "Find out the news, Slim. Get back as soon as you can make it."

SLIM nodded and reining his horse, he headed for town by way of the back streets. Bob and the others headed for what looked like a deserted ranch at the edge of town. "We'll manage there for grub and fresh horses," he told Shag. "It's one of the James Boys' stoppin' places. Safe as church or jail."

"Unless Jepp Santell has spread the word that Bob Amber is headed fer Albany," said Shag.

"Looky comin' yonder, Cap," said one of the men. "Ain't that one of your Diamond W men headed fer town like the devil was a-foggin' him?"

Bob nodded and rode out to meet the man. The cowpuncher was riding a sweat-marked, leg-weary horse. That he was the bearer of alarming news was stamped plainly on his weatherbeaten face.

"What's happened, man? The Santells didn't get that Nueces herd back?"

"Worse than that, Cap'n. The gover'-ment's done took the outfit. The soldiers is now in charge of the Diamond W herd. A damned smart-aleck lieutenant and twenty-thirty soldiers rode up about breakfast time. We'd just throwed the Nueces cattle into the Diamond W herd and was stringin' the smear out along the trail when they swarmed on us. They was after you, and claimin' that the outfit was the property of a outlaw and an enemy of the U.S. gover'ment. The cocky lieutenant 'lowed he'd take charge. Doc r'ared up, roarin' like a grizzly, an' knocked that smart-aleck officer down and tromped on his belly. Then the war was on.

"Doc yelled to me to ride like hell away from there and git word to you. They'd done took Doc prisoner after he laid out half a dozen with his gun-barrel. Them damned soldiers has the outfit. They won't know how to handle that overgrowed herd. They're forkin' good Diamond W horses right now, chousin' hell outa the cattle. Doc's fixed that lieutenant so's he ain't in shape to ride nothin' but a ambulance. Them ten dollar a month soldiers is half drunk, an' the outfit's all messed up. Doc's beat up bad. Macklin's give orders to shoot you on sight. Doc says your only bet is to quit the country and quit 'er fast. It's hell to pay!"

"Quit, hell!" muttered Bob Amber. He pointed toward town where a dust cloud showed, moving rapidly. Men on horseback were kicking up that dust.

"Hit for the barn, boys!" he called. "Yonder comes trouble. You guessed right, Shag. Jepp Santell beat us to town. They're after us!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Bait For the Jayhawker Gun-Trap

IT WAS called Sloan's Barn, and it had been used, time and again by the James boys and other outlaws. There was a big barn with a loft filled with hay, extra horses in the stalls and grub and ammunition cached there—even a well dug in one corner of the barn. The walls were built of rock and adobe, the windows fitted with heavy wooden shutters, the thick doors equipped with heavy bars on the inside to fasten them. Sloan's barn was built blockhouse fashion. A handful of men could stand siege there against a small army.

They reached the barn before the group of riders from town could head them off. Inside the barn, doors and shutters barred, they peered out through loopholes in the thick walls, as bullets spattered.

"Anyhow," said Shag, "It'll be cool and shady in here, and there's grub and mebbyso a keg hid here somewheres. If only we had us a deck of cards, we could do a little pokerin'."

He shoved the barrel of his saddle gun through a loophole, squinted along the sights, and pressed the trigger. The roar of the gun echoed in the big barn. From outside sounded the yelp of a man.

"That," grinned Shag, "would be a Santell, givin' up head like a calf bein' branded. I winged him as he run fer cover. Coulda killed him, but I let him off with a busted laig. Looks like there's a man behind every rock and bush and tree. They ducked in behind the house an' shed and the woodpile and pig pens. Must be half a hundred of 'em—as black-legged renegades as ever swarmed. Cap,

reckon Sloan has a keg buried hereabouts? Gun-fightin's thirsty work."

Then Sloan himself appeared—a tall, big-boned man with squinted, bloodshot green eyes and scraggly beard. He grinned at Bob.

"Long time no see you, Bob. Prison didn't hurt you none, to look at yuh. I was expectin' yuh. Grapevine told the news in town—feller named Jepp Santell. That'll be Marshal Herb Harper out yonder with a posse, and Hon, Jepp and Sid Santell. And Long Andy, if he's sobered up from the jag he was packin' last night and this mornin'. He was so drunk Judge Cole wouldn't turn that boy over to him. Cole taken the boy to his own home and had Long Andy throwed in jail fer contempt of court."

"Tad's at Judge Cole's?" Bob's face lighted up.

"Shore is. He's quite a young feller. Danged if he didn't try to shoot Long Andy and come damn nigh makin' a bull's eye. Only fer Herb Harper knockin' his gun barrel to one side, he'd got that long-geared snake. Right in the courtroom, this mornin', it happened. Long Andy Santell will kill the lad fer shore if ever he lays hands on him again. But Judge Cole is blowed up a-plenty. He's one man that ain't scared of all the Santells this side of hell. There's other carpetbagger politicians after his job and after his scalp. They might murder him, but they'll never bluff that Texan or make him run. You'd git a fair and square deal in his court, Bob. I done heard him say so, right in this barn, less than two weeks ago. And the man he told it to was Jesse James."

SLOAN paused to bite off a chew of cut plug. "Jesse had me fetch Judge Cole here to draw up a paper statin' that you'd never took part in ary robbery. You got Judge Cole on your side, Bob, but his hands is tied till you come up before him fer trial. That mob out yonder aims to kill you and collect the bounty that will be on your head till your name is cleared, legal. Judge Cole is takin' a lone stand ag'in' a pack of damned snakes like the Santells. He ain't even got the proper backin' of the military authorities, because Macklin claims you're a murderer and outlaw and a enemy of the gover'ment. Now that your trail herd is confiscated as stolen property, Bob, the Diamond W outfit will be sold here at Albany at a gover'ment auction. Hugh Macklin is a hard hater. What did you ever do to him?"

"His men took Joe Santell prisoner once. I slipped into the Yankee camp and got him back. Macklin never quit hatin' me. Nothing will ever convince him he's not right."

"You saved his sister and his daughter," Shag put in.

"That won't change him," Bob Amber grinned wryly. "I'll always be outlawed on Hugh Macklin's book. Sloan, we could use a drink. Those coyotes outside won't try to attack until dark. The boys need grub and a round of whiskey. They've money to pay for it. I'm the only tramp in the outfit."

"And may my right hand be cut off when it reaches fer a dollar of your money, Cap'n Bob! Hell, do you think my memory's so short I fergit who follered and killed the jayhawkers that burned my place and murdered my family in Kansas? You and Joe Santell and Shag and Slim done what I couldn't do, because I was full of jayhawker bullets. There was two of the Santell kin in that pack. Take money from any of you boys? Why, dammit, your money built Sloan's Barn!" His voice broke.

"You never was cut out fer a preacher, Sloan," said Shag. "Dig up your keg, and a deck of cards. We can't git to town to drink red likker and gamble our gold, so we'll take our pleasure here as best we

kin make out. If only we had a fiddle now, and some gals to swing, we'd be closer to heaven than we'll ever git."

"Comin' up!" said the hard-eyed Sloan. His wife and three daughters had been mistreated and murdered by the raiding Jayhawkers and he now lived only for revenge against his enemies. Neither the civil law nor even the soldiers dare bother Sloan. Fear of reprisal as meted out by the James boys and their men, made Sloan's life and property safe from annoyance.

That was Sloan's Barn, at the edge of Albany, the wild and wide-open cowtown where the cattle trails forked to the north. Sloan's Barn was known to the hunted men who had need of a stopping place, grub, ammunition, a fresh horse and a drink of white corn likker. Other men gave it a wide berth.

ONCE Sloan called out, when the mob outside had wearied of wasting good lead on the hard rock and adobe walls, the heavy plank doors and thick shutters.

"This ain't buyin' you nothin', Herb Harper! Take your snakes and crawl back in your dirty holes. Your hides ain't wuth a Mexican peso fer the lot, but we might start killin' you off to hear yuh squeal. This ain't winnin' you nothin'."

"Turn Bob Amber over to us or we'll smoke out the pack of yuh" bellowed Marshal Herb Harper. "We're after Bob Amber with a gover'ment warrant. Hand him over!"

Sloan answered his words with a bullet. There sounded a sharp cry of pain from a brush clump. Sloan's thin-lipped mouth twitched in a sardonic grin.

"One of his big feet was a-showin'. He's missin' a couple of toes. How's that likker go down, Shag?"

"Smooth, Sloan, smooth as molasses. A man could pour it on flapjacks. Ary you gents in the humor fer pokerin'? I found a deck in the mess box that has twenty-nine cards in 'er. We got a few hours' daylight left to play by."

Bob Amber got Sloan off to one side when the card game started around a saddle blanket spread on the barn floor.

"There's a tunnel to the house, Sloan. Where does it come out?"

"Comes out in the woodshed, and the trapdoor's hid so's they ain't likely to locate 'er."

"I'm usin' it after dark. I'm gettin' out because I'm going to see Judge Cole!"

"I'M the man they want," Bob Amber told Sloan and Shag and the two other men. "I'm going through the tunnel to see Judge Cole and sign over the Diamond W outfit to Doc, all legal. Long Andy's in jail an' he'll sign over the Nueces Pool herd to Tad Santell before I'm done with him. If Judge Cole will give me a fair trial and clear my name from the reward dodgers, I'll surrender."

"Gawdamighty, Cap'n!" gasped Shag. "You'd never live to stand trial. That mob out yonder would tear the jail apart to get at you! They'll hang you to the nearest pole. You're plumb safe here in Sloan's Barn. We kin hold off Macklin's cavalry from inside these ol' walls. With the grub and likker and ca'tridges we got, we kin stand a month's siege here. You're plumb loco to think of surrenderin'! Herb Harper's the Marshal of Albeny. He's one of the Santell kin, and he packs the keys to the jail!"

"I don't aim to go to jail, Shag," smiled Bob. "I'm surrenderin' to the Yankee army — to Major Hugh Macklin's cavalry!"

Shag shook his black-bearded, massive head. "A woman's smile has plumb softened you, Cap. But them two women can't soften Hugh Macklin a damned bit. He'll hang your hide on the fence."

"Shag," said Bob, the dark shadows of night inside the barn hiding the red flush that warmed his face, "If I'm killed be-

fore I sign those papers it will put Doc in a tight. They'll hang him for havin' those Nueces Pool cattle in his herd. I got to make Long Andy sign a bill of sale. I'm buyin' those cattle with gold. I'm payin' him ten dollars a head for the steers. I'm buyin' a thousand head at that price—ten thousand dollars."

"Where'll you git the money?" asked Sloan. "I got about a thousand in gold buried that you're welcome to, Bob."

"We kin make up the rest in gold and Yankee currency," said Shag. "Boys, empty your pockets. Cap needs ten thousand dollars!"

"He's done got 'er as soon as we kin drop 'er in the sack," said one of the men. "You won most of what we had, anyhow, Shag. There was better than ten thousand on the saddle blanket—"

"Hold on, boys," said Bob. "Your loyalty is worth all the gold that ever came out of the ground. But I don't need the money. Not a dollar of it."

"You're busted, Cap," said Shag.

"A man is never broke when his hide is worth somethin'," grinned Bob. "How much does the Yankee government offer for my scalp, Sloan?"

"Ten thousand is the price, all told."

"I'm surrenderin' to Judge Cole. He's the law at Albany. I'm claimin' that bounty money. After all, it's my own hide I'm peddlin'."

It was the sort of game that appealed to Shag and the other two men who had fought under Captain Bob Amber during the war. Many a time they had followed him on some wild, reckless venture when Captain Amber had struck without warning at Macklin's troops.

"By grabs, boys!" cried Shag, "Cap's goin' to beat Macklin' at his own game! We'll git you outa jail before they kin hang you."

"Judge Cole," said Sloan, "is a Texan. He'll give Bob a fair and square deal, and with Jesse James' sworn statement, Cole will turn you free, shore as hell, Bob. Macklin will have to make his damn Yankee gover'ment pay over ten thousand dollars to you. But Bob, your chances at the other end of this tunnel is a hundred to one ag'in' you."

"That'll be my worry," said Bob, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "A man who takes no risks never wins big stakes. And the stakes are Doc Buell's life, Tad's future—and a selfish gain of my own, if I clear my name."

"If you'd seen her, Sloan," chuckled Shag, "I bet you wouldn't blame Cap. By cracky, it'd hurt ol' Macklin' wuss than a gut-shot to have his daughter marry Cap'n Bob Amber. Gimme that dipper and the keg. We're drinkin' success to our Cap."

"If anything happens to me, one way or another," said Bob, "You men are in the clear. I'm the one they want. If they kill me, they'll disband. If I make it to Judge Cole's house, I'll be safe under military guard. And you boys can drift yonderly."

"We'll stand at your back, Cap, till your belly caves in. We'll see you through, win or lose. Here's luck!"

And when they had toasted his health, Bob let himself down into the mouth of the tunnel that led from the barn underground fifty yards to the woodshed at the edge of some brush and trees. In the woodshed, he was certain some of the Santells would be waiting, hoping for a chance at the blood-money on his head...

CHAPTER SIX

Death Rides the Night

THE AIR in the tunnel was damp and heavy and thick with earthy smells. He had to crawl on all fours, holding one gun in his right hand, the other in a shoulder holster under his left armpit. His left hand gripped a hunting knife.

That tunnel seemed endless. Bob's heart pounded against his ribs, sending the blood pulsing in his corded throat. Then the tunnel tilted upward and he could stand upright. The crown of his hat was touching the under side of the heavy plank trap door. He groped for the fastening that released it and stood there, holding his breath, ears straining to catch the slightest sound above.

By pre-arrangement, the men at the barn had started shooting to draw the gunfire of the mob. Bob heard the muffled roar of guns above him. They were making too much racket themselves to hear any tell-tale creak of the trap-door.

Now was the crucial, desperate moment when he'd gamble against his odds. His left fist, gripping the Bowie knife, shoved upward against the heavy door that was in a corner of the shed, behind some piled kegs and barrels and old boxes. It was heavier than he had thought.

Inch by inch he lifted the door. The shed was dark. He could hear the shuffling and clumping of boots, the faint jingle of a spur. Then voices.

"We're wastin' good lead! Where's that jug?"

"Never mind the jug, damn you, Jepp. You're drunk a'ready. You and Long Andy has made us enough trouble with his goin' after that Tad kid and you actin' the fool over that gal. She'll describe that ugly face of yourn with its one eye to Macklin and—"

"Gimme that jug, Sid, or I'll bust you wide open with a bullet."

Then Bob Amber pushed the trap door back.

Its hinges creaked but the two Santells in the shed were arguing hotly and didn't hear. Bob climbed the short ladder and, crouched behind the pile of barrels and boxes, he shut the trapdoor. Peering cautiously over the pile, he could make out the two men standing near the open doorway of the low-roofed shed. Outside the shed guns were cracking.

"I didn't let no man set me afoot," Bob heard Jepp Santell's nasal voice rasping, "and run me all over half Texas with a doubled rope. You're gutless as a rabbit, Sid. Hand over that jug, or—"

The two were suddenly fighting, wrestling and clubbing at one another.

Bob had to climb over the piled boxes and barrels. A barrel rolled down on top of the struggling pair. They broke apart, scrambling to their feet to face whatever had made the racket in the shed. Then one of them sighted Bob. He cried out something as his gun spat flame. The heavy slug scraped Bob's left shoulder. Bob's gun roared, once, twice. And he was on top of the two men who had gone down under his two quick shots.

One of the pair—Jepp—twisted, trying to shoot, and Bob shot him in the head. The two were dead. Bob crouched, shoving the Bowie knife in its sheath.

He expected men to come rushing into the shed, but nobody came. And the firing outside kept up steadily. The luck that had carried him through many a tight spot, was favoring him. He'd killed the one-eyed Jepp, the man who had shot young Lieutenant Cole. He'd also killed the treacherous Sid. And those men outside were none the wiser.

Bob Amber reloaded the gun. He slipped out the door and into the shadows. He was tempted to slip around through the mob that surrounded Sloan's Barn and wipe out Herb Harper and as many Santells as he could. But first he had a job to do.

He crept through the shadows. Around him were guns being loaded and fired and reloaded. There were shouts and even snatches of drunken, ribald songs. He came to some saddled horses grazing in an open clearing, bridle reins dragging, unguarded.

BOB chose a horse near the edge of the clearing. He mounted and rode toward the lights of town. He had a vague notion as to the part of town Judge Cole lived. He headed that direction, taking a roundabout route and keeping to the dark shadows of trees and back streets.

Some houses were in darkness; others showed lights. And then he sighted a two-story frame house with a white picket fence around its front yard. Lights showed behind drawn curtains. Outside were saddled cavalry horses. Bob counted eight horses, held by two men. Other troopers stood in groups in the front yard. A sentry stood at ease on the porch by the closed front door.

Bob swung to the ground, shoved his guns into their holsters, and opening the gate, strode down the wide gravel walk towards the porch. The troopers eyed him, more curious than suspicious. The sentry at the door halted him.

"Give your name and business!" he barked sharply.

"My business is with Judge Cole, and it's damned important. I'll tell my business and my name to him. Don't waste time, man. Escort me inside!"

"You can't go in there. Orders are to admit nobody. Major Macklin's in there and he's—"

"Then give my regards to Major Macklin. Tell him that Captain Bob Amber is surrendering to him."

"Bob Amber!" The trooper stared at him wide eyed. "Judas Priest!" And his thumb was pulling back the hammer of his carbine.

BOB grabbed the gun-barrel, yanked it with a jerk that sent the man off-balance. Tossing the carbine to one side he caught the soldier's blouse, whirled and threw him down the steps, jerked open the front door and stepped inside.

He barred the big front door and found himself in a hallway. From behind the closed folding doors on the right came the sounds of hushed voices. As the soldiers outside commenced banging on the front door with their guns, Bob walked to the folding doors and pulled them apart. Then he halted with a stiff jerk.

His hand went to his dusty black hat, pulling it off and he stared at the scene there before him.

Bob had forgotten, in the press of more vital things, the death of Judge Cole's son, until he saw the flag draped casket. The white-haired, white-moustached man in black stood beside it, shoulders bent with the heavy burden of grief. His head lifted, the eyes under shaggy gray brows wet with tears.

Anne Macklin and Molly sat in stiff-backed horsehair chairs. They both wore black. Tad, scrubbed until his freckled face shone, in a starched white blouse and black suit and tallowed boots, sat between them. At sight of Bob the boy gave a sharp, hoarse little cry and quit his chair.

Anne Macklin gripped Tad's arm. Both the women had been weeping. Their eyes were red-lidded, their faces white, bloodless in the lamplight.

"I'm sorry," stammered Bob Amber, and was suddenly painfully aware of his soiled, blood-spattered clothes. He was armed, and a hostile looking figure there, in the presence of death and grief. The pounding at the outer door was getting louder, more insistent.

"I'm intruding, sir," he said to Judge Cole and the several men who had gotten to their feet. None of them was Major Hugh Macklin. The only soldier in the room was a battered looking young lieutenant with one arm in a sling.

"The soldier on guard barred my way," Bob said. "I forced my way in here because my business is most urgent, Judge Cole."

"Who are you, sir?" questioned Judge Cole, his voice strangely quiet.

"I'm Captain Bob Amber, sir. I came

here to surrender to you and to Major Macklin."

"You're under arrest," snapped the lieutenant, fumbling at the closed flap of his gun holster. "For the murder of Major Macklin!"

Not until then did Bob Amber see the second flag-draped coffin.

BOB'S eyes slid from one face to the next. Tad had slipped from Anne Macklin's grip and came to Bob's side in quick strides that brought loud squeaks from his new red-topped boots.

"He's a liar, Cap'n Bob!" whispered the boy hoarsely, his words loud in the tense silence. "I bin tellin' 'em all that he lies when he says you shot Major Macklin!"

"Hush, partner," said Bob. "Lieutenant, you'd better stop your men before they break in the door." He faced the two women.

"Molly; Nurse Anne, I didn't kill Major Macklin. I didn't know he was dead. You can't believe that accusation!"

Molly was staring at him, her eyes wide with loathing and fear. The older woman's arm went around the girl's quivering shoulders. Anne Macklin smiled.

"We don't believe the accusation, Captain," she said, her voice firm. "Believe me, we don't. Lieutenant, put away your gun. Tell those men outside to quit that racket. Judge, you can take Captain Bob Amber's word for anything he says."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Bob. He was more stunned and shocked by the look he'd caught in Molly's eyes than he was by the false accusation of murder.

"I've just escaped from Sloan's Barn, sir," he said to Judge Cole. "There is somethin' important I have to tend to before the mob learns I've gotten through their lines to you. Some papers to make out. Here are my guns."

Bob Amber slid the two long-barreled Colt six-shooters from their holsters. Judge Cole shook his head, smiling, his hands still at his sides.

"You may need them, Captain. You've chosen a most dangerous time to surrender. No jail could hold you against that mob of skalawags. Those soldiers outside think you killed Major Macklin. I'll accept the responsibility of your surrender. But if that mob comes after you, I want you to have a fighting chance for your life. I don't want to be responsible for your murder. Keep your guns, sir. They belong to a brave man."

The cavalry officer had gone to the front door. He opened it and snapped an order at his men. "Bob Amber's a prisoner in this house. Guard both doors. If he tries to escape, shoot him down!"

Judge Cole took Bob's arm and led him into the library adjoining the parlor.

He motioned Bob to a chair and dropped wearily into the depths of a shabby old arm chair by the reading lamp.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Bob, "about your son. I killed the man who murdered him. One-eyed Jepp Santell."

"The same skalawag who murdered Major Macklin earlier the same night, from the scraps of information that Anne and I pieced together. Jepp Santell and some of his renegade stopped Major Macklin and the two soldiers with him. Macklin was carrying gold to pay off the soldiers stationed on scout duty here at Albany. Somehow Jepp Santell learned about the payroll, murdered Major Macklin and his soldiers, then attacked my son and the party escorting Molly and Anne Macklin. Lieutenant Foster, the man who just gave that damn fool order to shoot you down, had taken his men and ridden to confiscate your Diamond W trail herd. Foster, hoping to capture you, dead or alive and confiscate your outfit, overstepped his authority. He wanted to surprise Major Macklin on his arrival by turning over Bob Amber's dead body and the confiscated herd."

TAD had followed Bob into the library and stood beside his chair now. Bob's hand was on the boy's arm.

"Sir," said Tad, looking at Judge Cole, "I got away from Miss Anne this evenin'. I slipped off to learn what I could about Cap'n Bob. I hid in a back room at a saloon and heard Jepp talkin' to Hon and Sid. They buried the gold. I heard Jepp tell where he buried it. So I dug it up and hid it in your woodshed. It's there now."

"What?" Judge Cole leaned forward in his chair. "You mean you got the gold they stole when they killed Major Macklin? Why didn't you tell us before?"

"Because I wasn't tellin' nothin' in front of that Lieutenant Foster, sir. I don't like him. He's a damn' liar. I didn't aim to cuss, Cap'n Bob. But I don't like that feller. Neither does Doc."

"Doc?" Bob looked at Tad. The boy's face flushed.

"That Foster and his soldiers fetched Doc and a couple of the boys to town as prisoners. Locked 'em in a cellar and put a soldier on guard at the locked door. When it was gettin' dark I slipped up on the guard and hit him over the head with a club. I let Doc and the two cowpunchers out. We met a feller named Slim that said he come to town with you, Cap'n Bob. They're gatherin' men right now to wipe out the Santells and Herb Harper."

"Tad," said Bob, "is worth more than ten men sometimes. He's a lot like his father—does things without being told. Joe Santell was a different breed from the others of that name."

Judge Cole nodded. "I've looked up old records, Captain Amber. Joe Santell was adopted. He was no blood kin to the Santells, and the boy's no relation whatever. I meant to inform Long Andy Santell when he got sober enough to understand what I was saying."

Tad tried to say something but the words stuck in his throat. His face turned scarlet.

Bob's hand was on his shoulder. "Judge, I wanted to see you on important business. First I was goin' to sign over the Diamond W outfit to Doc Buell, so the government couldn't confiscate it."

"Not necessary, sir," said Judge Cole. "The Diamond W iron belonged to your father before you. It's not stolen. And I'm going to clear you of all charges against your name. I knew your father; fought side by side with him in the war against Mexico. I owe it to our old friendship to clear the name of his son. And I've all the evidence needed, here in my desk. The Diamond W iron and all the stock in it are yours. No carpetbagger politicians can rob you of your outfit or your good name. I had that evidence here to show Major Macklin when he arrived, because in clearing your name I was also whitewashing the black marks against the record of Joe Santell, who married Hugh Macklin's older daughter, Nancy.

The Judge cleared his throat noisily, and his eyes were very bright. "Did you know that Molly and Anne were on their way to visit Nancy's grave? They were. Charlie, my son, was going with them. Hugh Macklin was a fine man, but stubborn in many ways. He'd planned on marrying Molly to my son Charlie. I had other ideas about that marriage; so had Charlie. He'd proposed to Molly to please the Major. Then wrote me a long letter saying he didn't want to marry any girl. And he knew Molly didn't love him any more than he cared for her. He wanted me to straighten out the mistake Hugh Macklin had urged them both in making. I'm telling you this because I'm not blind. Neither is Anne Macklin. It was love at first sight, eh, between you and Molly?"

Bob's face crimsoned. Judge Cole smiled softly, something of the grief gone from his eyes. "Molly looked at me when

I came in like I was a snake. She believes that I murdered her father," said Bob.

"No. She believes nothing of the sort, Captain Amber. The girl's had a terrible shock, seeing her father brought here, covered with blood, dead. And that experience of Charlie's death and Jepp Santell's brutality left its mark. Those things were fresh in her mind and heart. You came into the room somewhat abruptly. Your appearance, Captain, is none too prepossessing. If there was a full length mirror in the room, you'd understand. The blood on your boots and clothes is still fresh. Your guns, the whole picture as you came in. . . ."

"Of course." Bob glanced at his clothes. "I didn't realize."

"It was somewhat of a shock, even for Anne, who was a war nurse. By the way, you have a staunch admirer in Anne Macklin. I have on file quite a stack of letters from that lady concerning the injustice done one Captain Bob Amber. A man in my boots might have had just cause to be jealous. My wife, Captain, has been dead many years. Anne Macklin was on her way here to do me the honor of becoming my wife. It was our secret shared only by Molly. I'm letting you—and Tad—in on it. . . ."

"Yes, sir." And Bob saw the white-maned judge smile.

Judge Cole broke the silence. "There's work to be done, Captain. Tad says Doc Buell is organizing men to fight the Santells and that Marshal Herb Harper, who's a disgrace to the badge he hides behind. I knew Doc years ago—a good cowman and a real Texan. Captain Amber, I have authority as Judge of Albany to swear you in as marshal. You'll find Doc Buell and organize a vigilante posse as swiftly as possible. And use your own judgment from there on in ridding Albany of as vile a band of skalawags as ever broke the laws of God or Texas. Stand, sir, and take your oath of office!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Gunsmoke Lochinvar

BOB AMBER told Judge Cole of his plan to collect the reward on his own hide and use the money to buy the Nueces herd for Tad. A smile twitched the corners of the judge's mouth.

"Why not? The Yankees owe you that much, and more, Captain Bob. I'll take care of it. Now I'm calling in Lieutenant Foster and putting him and his men under your orders. He needs a lesson."

"Keep Foster and his men here at the house, sir, if you will. They'd only be in the way. Doc and I will handle the men better without him and his Yank soldiers. Besides, I'm afraid Doc might treat him rough."

"You're right," agreed Judge Cole.

"Can't I go along, Cap'n Bob?" asked Tad.

"Your place is here, partner. You've done enough already this evenin' to earn a medal or two. Ride herd on your Aunt Molly and Nurse Anne. That's orders, Tad."

Lieutenant Foster took Judge Cole's orders in tight-lipped silence.

"Tell 'em I'm no damned wolf to be shot down for bounty money. Keep 'em here at the house, and away from my men. You've done enough damage, mister, by scattering my cattle and arresting my men. Bother me again and I'll tend to you personally. Understand that?"

Outside, Bob swung aboard the horse he'd left before the white picket fence. And five minutes later he found Doc Buell and Slim and a crowd of men gathered around the jail that held Long Andy Santell. They were about to break down the jail door and drag Long Andy out to lynch him when Bob rode up.

"Stand your hand, Doc!" called Bob. "We'll hang him legal when we've mopped up on the others."

"Bob!" roared old Doc. "Bullet proof, shore as hell—like I told you men he was! Thought you was at Sloan's Barn. Where's my young partner Tad? Man, there's a button that shore makes a hand in a tight!"

"Tad's at Judge Cole's givin' orders to the Yank soldiers. All set, men? Follow me. The Santells are all around Sloan's Barn. Charge 'em. You don't need any instructions from here on. Judge Cole just swore me in as Marshal of Albany. Let's go!"

The fighting hand-to-hand was swift, terrific. It was each man for himself. And in the midst of it, Shag, Sloan and the two other men came charging out of the big barn, horses at a run.

Doc's deep-throated roar sounded above the shooting as he sighted Herb Harper and charged him as he tried to spur his horse away from the fighting. Doc cut off the man's retreat, riding at him with flaming gun. Herb Harper whirled his horse to meet Doc Buell's charge. Doc's lead knocked him from the saddle. Then Doc's horse piled up, throwing him.

Hon Santell came at Doc. Bob spurred across the open gap, yelling, and their guns cross fired. A bullet nicked Bob's side as he cut Hon Santell down. Bob was about to quit his horse to see if Doc was dead or badly wounded, when the old trail-boss got to his feet, limped a few steps, cussing a sprained leg. Doc's horse struggled up, and Dov grabbed the reins.

"Hurt, Doc?"

"Hurt, hell! Horse stepped in a hole. I want that damned Sid's scalp!"

"You'll find Sid and Jepp at the shed yonder. They're not fightin' any more. Take charge here, Doc—I'll see you later!"

BOB spurred his horse past the barn and headed for the jail. He found the jail door swinging open, and the jail empty. Some of the Santell mob, or perhaps Herb Harper himself had let Long Andy Santell out. Bob leaned from the saddle, peering into the darkness of the jail. Then, from an old shed behind Bob, came the rasping voice of Long Andy Santell, raised in a shout of evil triumph,

"I got you where I want yuh, Bob Amber! I'm goin' to kill yuh. Got the drop on yuh, and I'm barricaded. I killed your brother and I'm killin' you. And I'll tell you why so you kin take the word to hell for your old man. He run me off the Diamond W ranch once; whupped me off with a quirt. I lived to shoot him in the back at Shiloh. I killed your young whelp of a brother when he got on the prod at Jake Murphy's saloon. I got Tad drunk and ribbed the kid into tellin' Gary Amber that there was a Major Amber got shot in the back at Shiloh when he turned yaller and started chargin' to the rear. The kid was too young and too drunk to know what he was sayin'. Your whelp of a brother wanted to know who put him up to sayin' Major Amber was a coward. Tad wouldn't tell him. Later on I shoved my gun in Gary Amber's back, told him I'd put the kid up to it. Told him I'd shot Major Amber in the back because I hated his guts. And then I pulled the trigger. Now I'm killin' me the last damn Amber. I'm—"

"I got him, Cap'n Bob!" Tad's shrill voice broke into Long Andy's rasping snarl that came from the bandages that wrapped his fractured jaw. "I'm behind him and I'm pluggin' 'im!"

Tad's voice came from somewhere in the shadow near the shed. Then a gun roared. Bob heard the boy's short scream and Long Andy's muffled snarl.

Raking his horse with the spurs, Bob charged the shed, quitting the saddle as his horse slid to a halt. And as Long Andy's tall figure jumped erect, Bob's

gun roared, spitting red lances of flame.

Long Andy went down shooting. Bob's gun sent bullet after bullet into the sagging form as it dropped, until his gun was empty. He stepped across Long Andy Santell's dead body and ran to where Tad was sitting. Tad's right arm hung limply. With his left hand he was holding his broken arm against his body.

"I didn't have a gun, Cap'n Bob," he said, as Bob bent over him. "Them damn soldiers at the house taken my six-shooter. I disobeyed orders and slipped away from the house to see the fightin'. Herb Harper had give Long Andy a key to the jail lock and he had a gun. I seen Long Andy git out just before you rode up. I hid here by the shed, heard him say what he said to you. I wasn't close enough to grab his gun when he was coverin' you. So I run a bluff to git his attention on me. I was tryin' to make up for what I said to Gary Amber. I wanted—"

The boy's words trailed off into silence. He had fainted in Bob's arms.

Bob Amber fastened a tourniquet about the boy's bullet shattered arm and carried him to Judge Cole's house.

Anne Macklin opened the door, her face white as she saw the blood that covered the boy's white shirt.

"Broken arm," said Bob. "He got it saving my life. He's small, but I've never seen a man with more courage. Not even a man named Sergeant Joe Santell. And Joe Santell was the bravest man I ever knew."

Bob Amber was unaware of his own ghastly appearance. One of Long Andy's bullets had ripped his cheek. He had another rip across one thigh, and a grazed rib that reddened his torn shirt. As he laid Tad on a couch, grinning down at the boy whose eyes now opened, he did not see Molly come into the room from the door behind him.

But Anne Macklin saw her. She saw the color drained from Molly's cheeks, and saw the look of horror in the girl's eyes. And Anne Macklin smiled as Molly fought back her terror.

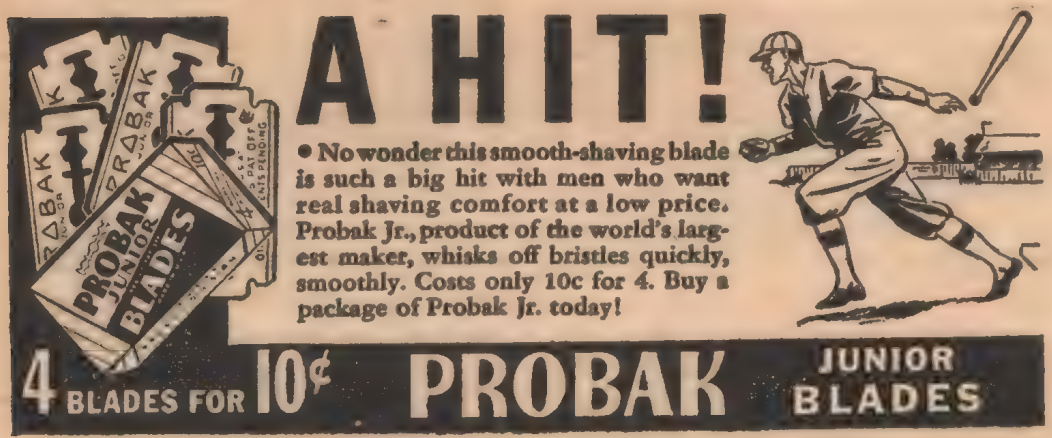
Bob heard her step and turned, looking at Molly. . . .

Afterward, long afterward, they were to remember what happened then, and laugh at Molly.

Tad and Anne and Judge Cole had stood just behind Molly in the doorway.

"I can't kiss you," Molly had said as she stood there, her face chalk-white, her hands clenched. "I can't kiss you, Bob, till I've got your face cleaned. . . !"

THE END


A HIT!
• No wonder this smooth-shaving blade is such a big hit with men who want real shaving comfort at a low price. Probak Jr., product of the world's largest maker, whisks off bristles quickly, smoothly. Costs only 10c for 4. Buy a package of Probak Jr. today!
PROBAK JUNIOR BLADES
4 BLADES FOR 10¢ PROBAK JUNIOR BLADES

Half & Half Makes ONE Swell Smoke!

You'll cheer during both halves of Half & Half. Cool as a tie with two minutes to play. Smooth as a touch-down that wins for your side. Fragrant, friendly, full-bodied tobacco that won't bite the tongue—in a tin that won't bite the fingers. Made by our exclusive modern process including patent No. 1,770,920. Cool and smooth. Smells good. Makes your pipe welcome anywhere. Tastes good. Your password to pleasure!

Copyright 1937, The American Tobacco Co.

Not a bit of bite in the tobacco or the Telescope Tin, which gets smaller and smaller as you use up the tobacco. No bitten fingers as you reach for a load, even the last one.

HALF AND HALF

The Safe Pipe-Tobacco

FOR PIPE OR CIGARETTE

Guns Can't Fight the White Death!

(Author of "Death Waits at Roaring Gulch," etc.)

By Harry F. Olmsted

Old Tom couldn't avoid the rope.

A hundred stricken, blizzard-doomed men and women took old Sheriff Howden off the man-hunt trail—casting to the slashing storm-driven winds everything for which he'd fought, hoped and lived for fifty bitter years! A story you'll remember!

THE futile fluttering of slipping drivers and the shrill plaint of car wheels against steel tracking brought Sheriff Tom Howden to the frosted window of his office. His seamed face flattened against the pane and

through a spot rubbed free of rime he watched Number Nine, behind a two-engine plow, thunder through Lodgepole in a blossoming cloud of steam.

For three days it had been snowing and all the signs pointed to continued storm. In fact, it was snowing now—spitting tiny flakes from a hazy sky in which the sun rode like a brassy ball. It was cold—bitter cold. The restless wind shrilled eerily about the snow-laden roofs and the men of the uplands were making ready for the inevitable period of isolation, with all means of communication cut off, and the world a haunting white silence.

That it would be a severe winter had been no secret to men of the high country. Fiercely the squirrels had toiled to fill their caches. Bear had holed up earlier than any living man could remember. And from the lodges of the Southern Cheyennes came the solemn promise of the seers: "A hard winter and a long one. Snow will pile on snow. Three moons of little meat, big hunger and cruel cold."

Sheriff Howden saw the jet of the engine whistle, heard the scream of it and sensed the slowing of the train. On the rear car platform poising himself for the leap, appeared a man dressed in a great coat and carrying a small grip. If the train came to a full stop, it must back about four miles to a flat where the drivers could regain traction. If a man wanted to stop at Lodgepole in this kind of weather, he'd have to jump for it. But why would a man want to come to Lodgepole?

Tom Howden saw the man jump, sprawl in the snow, then vanish toward the main street with his head bent against the blast. The lawman, the day's excitement done, stoked up the pot-bellied stove and eased into his deep chair with fuming pipe. He was hardly settled when the door gusted open to admit a rush of wind, a few snowflakes—and a man, chunky and determined looking in his big bearskin coat.

"Howdy," he greeted, laconically. "Sheriff Howden?"

"The same," grunted the sheriff. "Drag off yore coat an' set. You come in on Number Nine, no?"

"Yes," admitted the stranger, slipping off the heavy wrap. "Name of Kane Landon."

Old Tom Howden stood up and dropped his pipe. "Not Kane Landon, the—?"

"Deputy U. S. marshal, Cheyenne District," acknowledged the other, and drew off heavy mittens to shake hands.

"Lost, ain't yuh?" queried the sheriff, a little awe of this great manhunter reflected in his voice. "Or mebbyso come to spend the winter in our salubrious climate, as the feller said?"

"Neither," said Landon. "I'm making the rounds of all sheriff's offices in the country bordering the Old Outlaw Trail. Meeting the sheriffs personal, sizing up their calibre and about how they'll act in a pinch. No, don't look skeptical, Howden. I've met a lot of men in my time—a good part of 'em uncaught crooks. I think I can tell about how a man stacks up after talkin' with him awhile. You're interested in why I'm doin' all this. Well, here's why—"

He stretched his feet to the fire, bit off the end of a cigar and lit the weed.

"First of all," he said through the smoke, "the Wild Bunch didn't go south this winter. Don't ask me why, unless it is that southern sheriffs are getting a little tougher on them devils than those around here. And there you've put a finger on the sore, Howden. Without men holding office who are untrue to their oath, Cassidy and his robbers wouldn't last a month. Just how do you stand, Howden?"

"Never forgot my oath yet," grumbled the sheriff. "Never will."

"You may get a chance to prove yourself," said the marshal grimly. "The Bunch is caught in the mountains in may-

beso as hard a winter as we've ever had. We're organizing every arm of the law and, before spring, we'll have Cassidy in a ring of steel. Now, if you've got a map of Colorado . . . ."

FOR hours they pored over the map, the marshal sketching possible movements of the most baffling band of organized outlaws ever sought by a badly outraged law. At noon, the two men continued their planning in the Chink restaurant, several doors down the street. Later they talked some more in the sheriff's office. Until, over the howl of the wind, the whistle of Number Two came rifling through Lodgepole. Then Kane Landon rose, donned his coat and gripped the sheriff's hand.

"Thanks for your co-operation, Howdell," he beamed. "I'm bankin' on you and others who feel just as you do. If the trains keep running and the wires stay up, I'll keep you posted. So-long."

"So-long, Marshal," murmured Tom Howden. When the man was gone toward the station he murmured, "That's the trouble. The trains can't keep runnin' an' the wires won't stay up unless it quits stormin'. An' it ain't gonna quit."

It was snowing harder. Tom Howden could hardly see Number Two as it slid down the grade. Thoughtfully, the lawman went to a drawer in his desk, pulled out a bundle of dodgers, and sat down to stare into the bold faces of the most badly wanted men in all the Americas. There was blunt-featured Butch Cassidy; Kid Curry; Sundance Kid, the Merino Kid, and Long Ben Kilpatrick. Bill Carver, Bill Cruzan and Bob Lee! Etta Place and glamorous Laura Bullion! And others, up to the number of twenty-five. And that number wasn't a fourth of the far-flung organization rodded by George Leroy Parker—more notoriously known as Butch Cassidy.

Tall men, short men, fat men, lean men, yet there was something curiously alike about them all. Maybe it was their eyes. Yes, that was it. Hard eyes, desperately reckless eyes, and Tom Howden wondered as he sorted those papers how and when and why the humor and kindliness had been erased from their faces. He wondered, knowing the inflexibility of man-made laws, if these men were all that was said of them. Or whether, as the rumors grew and grew, if there might not be justification for their acts against society.

Half angrily, the sheriff denied it as he put the handbills away. He'd heard of good badmen, but the only ones he had seen were good and dead. Men, he decided wearily, fell into two classes; those for and against the law. That was the only way a sheriff could look at it, unless —he wanted to turn in his star. Cassidy and his coyotes would find no haven in Lodgepole as they had in other towns, from Chinook on the north, down to the Mexican border.

ALL night it snowed. No trains went through the next day, nor thereafter. Deep drifts covered the rails. The wires failed from impossible overloads of ice. And still it snowed. Days would dawn clear, but before Lodgepole could dig out, another storm would roll down to mock them. Men's tempers grew brittle in the fever of inactivity and they fretted and fumed, cursing the monotony of the snow.

To old Tom Howden, in particular, it was a trying time. For he had to fight loneliness and worry as well as the other ills of the snowbound. Tom's wife and daughter were caught in Granite, fifteen miles deeper up in the mountains. They were comfortable and in the good hands of Tom's brother-in-law, but their absence bade fair to become unbearable before they could be brought out. First real break in the weather, he'd go up and bring them out in a sled. There should be an extended lull any day now.

There was little sympathy to waste for the grief of the other fellow. Seemed like everybody had his own troubles and found them of exaggerated importance. Like Jonas Trout, prey to chillblains, having to shovel snow off his Mercantile roof lest it cave in. Or Nick Deventre and Carl Carlson—partners in the blacksmith shop, getting cabin fever from looking at one another and fighting it out with single jacks. Both were moaning now with the agony of broken ribs, and under a doctor's care.

One by one, the days of December became snow-cursed history. Then, suddenly Tom realized that tomorrow would be Christmas. Tom Howden marveled that the Yuletide spirit was about as much in evidence as was the light of the sun—which Lodgepole had seen just three times in twenty-four days. Even the bleak daylight was fading now into Christmas Eve, with the wind howling from the north and the promise of snow, which hadn't fallen for some hours, heavy in the teeth of it.

In his office, Tom Howden pushed back his hopeless solitaire, rose and drew on his coat. Christmas Eve! He'd step down to the Buckhorn Bar and have a little Tom and Jerry with the boys. Everybody had been getting pretty snarly of late, but a little Christmas cheer would be a good tonic. And later, mebby he'd fetch Old Parson Gilliam over to say a few words to the boys. Things like that never hurt none . . . .

The sheriff stepped out into the wind-swept street. The light was failing, but there were lamps burning in the Buckhorn Saloon and Henry Barton, the proprietor, was busy in the window. He was hanging a wreath there—a wreath fashioned with small fir boughs and used as a verdant framing for a little red bell, trade mark for a popular brand of whiskey.

That stopped Sheriff Howden. And Henry Barton, noting his interest, waved a gay invitation. Maybe it was his loneliness that caused Tom Howden to be touched by that little scene. He knew what it meant to tramp yonderly to cut those fir boughs. It was a whole lot easier to sit by the fire and let the Christmas cheer come out of bottles. What if there was a near-nude form of a woman on the bell, and a lot of advertising matter? It was the spirit of the thing. There was lots of good in men. Even an outlaw might let the good in him come out when he gave thought to his mother, or to Christmas. Even Cassidy and his killers . . . .

Tom Howden pulled his coat around him against the sting of the gale and started plowing across the snow-tumbled street. He saw it then—the dark shape shambling along on all fours.

The lawman halted, staring. His first thought was that a bear, somehow routed out of hibernation, had stumbled down into town, drawn perhaps by the smell of food. But no . . . . The thing swung its head like a bear but was too small.

He heard somebody yell far along the street. A man darted from a building and was running toward the crawling thing, waving his arms and hollering excitedly. And, in that moment, the sheriff knew the thing to be a human being. And then he too was stumbling through the snow at a grotesque run.

It was a man and, more important, it was Fetley Jenks, deputy sheriff of Granite. Fetley Jenks, whose frost-cracked lips, blackened face and total exhaustion proclaimed the struggle he had faced getting down to Lodgepole. His eyes were rolling and his lips were moving in a vain attempt to convey some message.

"Get him inside!" ordered the sheriff. "The man's tryin' to tell us something an' he's too beat to make it."

STRONG arms lifted Deputy Jenks and bore him into the Buckhorn Saloon, where old Doc Fetterman would be sure

to be playing his usual bad game of draw poker. There, under the direction of the medico, they rubbed frozen ears, hands and feet with snow, administered an heroic stimulant, worked life into the man's frozen carcass and were at last rewarded.

"It's Granite town, boys!" the deputy gasped. "Up yonder it's awful. Snowslide buried half the town. Ten bodies recovered so far, an' that many more buried till spring. But worst of all is grub. Ain't enough left to last another day. Stores an' business houses wiped plumb off the mountain. If it had happened in daylight, over half of the town would be dead. It will be anyway unless you git food through—an' that's tough. Slides everywhere! It's plumb—hell . . . ."

A snore shook him and he was asleep.

An aching silence fell upon the now-thronged barroom. All were looking at Sheriff Tom Howden, but Tom's brain seemed full of frozen fire. So poisonous was the fear that had seized upon him, he couldn't move or think—to say nothing of acting. His Sarah and little Martha were up there in stricken Granite! In his terror, he saw an ugly picture of their battered bodies lying with the rest of the ten Fetley Jenks had mentioned. Lying stark and cold in some hastily improvised morgue . . . .

A shudder swept him and he covered his eyes with his hands. And for one breathless instant the silence seemed to become absolute. The boys all knew why the sheriff was moved, and they grieved for him. Then Tom Howden's long-practiced self discipline asserted itself. What a fool he was for giving way to fear! There were two hundred people in Granite. Ten had been killed and as many more were missing. The odds were better than five to one that Sarah and Martha were all right. Tom Howden straightened and his seamed face set in determined lines.

"I want ten volunteers," he snapped, "to follow me into Granite."

He got twenty, in a clamorous rush. Grinning his admiration, he picked the ten strongest, tolling off their names, sending each of the picked company to one side.

"Each man pick up a top mount an' a pack mule!" he ordered. "Don't worry about losin' 'em; the County will take care of any losses. Lead the packs around to the Mercantile Store an' we'll load 'em with vittles . . . ."

They pulled out of the saloon with a roar. Some minutes later, the pack animals were lining up at the loading platform behind the big store and a line of townsmen were hurrying supplies from the counters to fill the panniers. When the last of ten hitches were being drawn, three of the town's most prominent men led Tom Howden aside.

"Tom," said the mayor. "This trip is for warm-blooded, tireless youngsters. It's no good for one of your years. Yes—I know what you'll say. You won't ask any man to do what you're unwilling to do yourself. We admire the sentiment in you, Tom, an' your courage. But this time we have our way. We need you too bad to throw you away where you ain't needed. If you won't stay peaceable, we've decided to throw you in your own jailhouse. And the whole town's behind us. Now take it easy, fella . . . ."

But Tom couldn't take *that* easy. He cussed and fumed; he threatened and he cajoled. He even got hostile and tried to dig his gun out from under his coat—running a great big bluff. But the gent who pulls a gun when he don't mean it hasn't a chance with anybody but a tenderfoot, anyway. They leaped upon him and took the gun away. So Sheriff Tom Howden had to stand there with tears freezing on his cheeks, with great sobs shaking him, and watch those ten riders and their led packs vanish into the murky pall of stormy Christmas Eve.

They were back around midnight. At

least, nine of them were back. Nine who had sworn to get through to Granite or die trying. Moving snow had carried one over the abyss to a snowy tomb. Another's horse had fallen with him, breaking his hip. He was lashed to the saddle when they returned, his head rolling grotesquely, unconscious from an agony that is more than the frail human frame can endure. They were back, battered, awed and chastened. If Granite depended upon getting help from Lodgepole, it was doomed. The project was beyond human ingenuity and endurance.

Seemed like the whole town was jammed into the Buckhorn barroom to discuss ways and means. In the end, men fell silent and gave themselves up to brooding, and drinking. Outside, the tireless storm wind wailed through the town, driving occasional flurries of snow and sleet against the frosted panes.

Inside it was warm, so cozy indeed that it palled upon Sheriff Tom Howden, where he sat alone at a rear table. It wasn't right that he should be enjoying such comfort while women and kids were hungry in Granite, while men yonder were wrestling with death, and the grisly fear of it. What was to be done?

He was asking that for the first time when there was a hoarse shout and the saloon door opened to admit Pike Peters, the telegraph operator and night station agent. He slammed the door behind him and waved a bit of yellow paper on high.

"Boys!" he cried, striking a triumphant pose. "I'm happy to announce that Lodgepole's on the map again. Mebby for good, mebby for only an hour. But I just got word over the wires that the breaks has been repaired. And likewise—the first telegram!"

"From Granite?" The query burst from a dozen throats, and Tom Howden was on his feet, his face pale, his heart beating furiously against his ribs.

The agent shook his head, shadows glooming his eyes. "Won't get no wires fixed between here an' Granite," he opined discouragingly. "This one's from Lovington Junction. For Tom Howden!"

He fetched it over and laid it in the sheriff's hands. Old Tom read it, then read it again. His hands dropped to his side and he stared away into nothingness for a minute pregnant with the avid hunger of impatient men. Then, though his eyes remained unchanged, he was laughing, laughing so mirthlessly it shocked the listeners.

"What is it, Tom?" they demanded of him. "Let us in on the joke."

"Shore," he gasped, holding his sides. "It's from Kane Landon, U. S. marshal, who come in on the last Number Nine an' went out on the last Number Two. He says that a bunch of riders come into North Fork yesterday on tuckered ponies, taken over the town, commandeered whatever they wanted—includin' fresh ponies, an' pulled out. Headed thisaway. He wants us to spread a net an' drag' em in." Whereupon he launched again into gales of hard laughter. And they all laughed with him. That *was* a joke! Spread a net for somebody's lost outlaws—while Granite town cried vainly for help!

ABRUPTLY sobered, the lawman walked out of the barroom and into the unfriendly night. A flask of whiskey was in his pocket, a stubborn fatalism taking hold of his being. He didn't tarry. He found the stable empty, as he had guessed. The hostler was in the Buckhorn. His own fine horse he rigged with pack saddle and kiacks, filling the bags with slabs of bacon, with coffee, dried beef and other concentrated foods from the ten pack outfits that had tried and failed. He saddled the freshest remaining animal in the barn, fearful as he did so that the beast had already given too much that night.

Minutes later he was riding across the wind toward the black maw of the canyon, whence led the trail to Granite. The beaten track of the unsuccessful crusaders was easy to follow, the snow packed nicely. It was snowing just enough to make it miserable. The sub-zero air sliced through Tom Howden's nostrils and his breath trailed out behind him in vapory banners. He tied his scarf up around his face, against the chance of the frost touching his lungs.

Stubbornly, he refused to argue with himself as to why he attempted the impossible when younger, stronger men had failed. It was a sense rather than a conscious reasoning that drove him.

In the snicking of the snow against his greatcoat, he seemed to hear his daughter Martha's plea for help. In the plaint of the cruel wind, he heard the anguished voice of his wife, crying for him to come. Those voices he was answering in the only way he knew. To hell with Kane Landon and his bounty-hunger! To hell with the Wild Bunch! *Somebody* had to get through to Granite. If he couldn't do it—well, then it wouldn't matter, anyway.

The going wasn't bad until he came to the slide where disaster had overtaken the previous attempt. There the beaten trail ended and real grief began. The way led along the mountain side, where snow had filled the road and dangerous slides might be expected anywhere. In the wind-scourged blackness, Tom Howden glanced over the steep slant that had carried one of the town boys to his doom. Couldn't see ten feet, but a feller could sure feel the awfulness of that black drop into nothingness. . . .

Old Tom drove his own personal horse instead of leading it. The heavily loaded animal, seeming to sense the great need, didn't balk. In powerful plunges, he took the soft untracked banks ahead, breaking the way for the weaker animal the sheriff bestrode. It was gruelling work and whenever the powerful trail-breaker stopped, the man let him have a moment to recoup. By all odds, the lawman's personal horse should have failed first. But it was his saddler that began to cough and wheeze. From that moment on, it was a losing battle for Tom to keep the animal going. Its lungs were touched and it was filling up—feverish and weakening fast.

Less than a mile had they broken drift when the beast went down. Old Tom shot it. Then he was lunging ahead on foot, following the horse, conserving his strength for those steeper, tougher miles ahead. He didn't let himself think too much about those miles. If a man thought about them, he'd go crazy before ever reaching them. Up and up, following sharp switchbacks, where only his knowledge of the ground saved him from losing the buried road entirely.

Old Tom's heart was pounding a mad tattoo against his ribs, and his legs were tying up. He knew then that he was old. His mirror had told him so before. But otherwise he had been scornful of the idea that he wasn't as good a man as ever before in his life. It made him wonder whether he had what it would take to finish what he had started .... Whether they might not find him, next spring ....

He and the horse were stopping oftener now, resting longer. Old Tom felt the cold seeping into his bones as his vitality ebbed, as the sweat of growing weakness chilled in his clothes. He took a pull at the bottle, gnawed at some strips of beef jerky he always carried in case of emergency. It picked him up, but the gain was a transient, unsatisfactory thing. He drank again, and again. How stiff he was getting. His feet were numb and he fought against a growing drowsiness, an ever increasing urge to call the whole thing off .... And sleep.

He sang; he whistled. He tried to roll a cigarette, but the wind whipped the tobacco away and tore the paper from his

nerveless fingers. It took a mental effort now to keep his legs moving. Right, left! Right, left! His pack animal went down, but somehow he got the beast up. They were dawdling, making no time at all.

Suddenly the foreground was lengthening and a bleak gray dawn was upon the snowlands. That seemed to jar old Tom awake and to the alarming knowledge they were no longer on the road to Granite. Then, even as he stared at it, the beaten lawman knew he had given in to weariness and fatigue and was dreaming.

Through the frigid dawning came the plaint of driven cattle, the shouts of men!

Against the background of snow, he saw horses come lunging over a rise, attacking the drift. Two hard-riding men were battling to turn the beasts from the puny track made by old Tom and his pack, and succeeding. There were a dozen fat, unsaddled ponies breaking the trail. And, behind them, hazed on by three coated and muffled men, came a little herd of cattle. Whatever from hell?

Like a man in the grip of some chimerical dream, Tom Howden stood there beside his heaving pony and watched that strange unbelievable parade approach and pass him. They were on the road and he was two rods downhill from it. Had dawn delayed another few moments, he would have been hopelessly lost in a wilderness of snow. Unless this was a dream . . . .

HE PICKED up the brands on the flanks of those drift-bucking ponies. Boxed A C! Cripes, those were some of the fine Morgans of old Abner Conklin! And the cattle . . . . Yes, they wore the same iron. What the hell was this . . . ?

One of the first pair of riders spotted old Tom standing there, flung up a hand. "All right, Old Timer?" he bellowed and the echoes slashed out through the timber.

"Yeah . . . . All right," croaked the lawman, hardly conscious he had spoken in the shock of recognizing the one who had hailed him. Even then, it seemed like a dream—or a nightmare!

The man was long-coupled and wide-faced, with the tightly slitted eyes and the stubby, up-turned nose of a fighting man. Hadn't been so long since old Tom had looked at that face—on a dodger! Here was Butch Cassidy, alias Jim Lowe and christened, according to some, George Leroy Parker, and leader of the most badly wanted gang the western country had ever known. His face was bearded and burned with frost, but nothing could disguise that humorous yet half terrifying grin. Behind him was Kilpatrick—the one called Long Ben—a reckless spirit held in thin restraint.

They stared at him more in curiosity than with suspicion and rode past, holding the fine horses of old Abner Conklin to their heroic chore of breaking trail for the moaning cattle. Like a man in a trance, old Tom Howden watched that strange procession wend its way past him. Two men were whooping up the drags—burly Harry Longabaugh, delighting in the pseudonym of Sundance Kid, and stocky Bill Carver. That was four. Old Tom had counted five. He let his eyes swing out into the murk, but saw nothing.

But if it were a dream, it brought with it a lot of condemning reflections. The lawman saw the serious face of Kane Landon, deputy U. S. marshal; heard his pointed, eager arguments why every officer should keep always as his guiding star the precepts of his sworn oath. Landon had said that if every sheriff did his duty before God, Cassidy and his Wild Bunch wouldn't last a month. And he, Tom Howden, was letting them ride right through his fingers. Letting them ride with horses and cattle stolen from the sheriff's own neighbor!

In a flash, Old Tom knew what they were trying to do. A mile farther on, the road forked—the right branch leading into Granite, the left branch leading west and

down to the Utah desert beyond. This band of outlaws were risking their lives on the one and only way of getting their contraband out of these frozen hills. And a wave of grudging admiration, mingled with hate, swept the sheriff. Where those forks parted it was only a few bitter miles to Granite—so close indeed that the starving townsfolk would almost hear the plaint of the stolen cattle. That beef might mean the difference between life and death. Cassidy must never complete that trek.

A lot of crazy ideas were born in old Tom's weary brain then. But transcending any one of them was the simple truth that one man cold not well handle that struggling mixed herd of stock. He must use the outlaws at least as far as the forks. And then . . . .

Tom Howden found the way paved for him as he followed in their wake, suiting his pace to theirs because he was very weary and nearly done. But the anger that wore at his veins lit new interest in his flagging mind, gave him the determination to be on their tail at the forks. And he was.

Through spitting snow, he saw the trail-breakers lunge toward the easier downward pitch of the desert road. And he heard the whoops of the riders as they urged their weary ponies along the swings. Then Old Tom gave way to a rage that had builded to a positive hate. He halted his horse, jerked his Winchester from under the kiack. His fingers were too numb to feel the weapon, but he could still snick a shell into the barrel. He knelt in the snow, brought the rifle up slowly, grooving the bead in the sight and bringing it to bear upon the broad back of Butch Cassidy.

Inside him was something of a pang. He had never shot a man without giving him an even break. To him, the gun-code was a living, breathing chivalry. But these were wolves, not men. Men put bounty on wolves, destroyed them because of their savagery. Besides, they were four to one, all deadly gunmen and desperate.

Old Tom targeted the leader. His will commanded his numb finger to squeeze the trigger prong. And then—then the sheriff heard the shout behind him. It went through him like a knife. He forgot his target, lowering the gun and swinging it as he rose.

Immediately behind him loomed a charging horseman. A deadly, contorted face, the burning eyes and the granite face of Harvey Logan—Kid Curry. The drooping, unkept mustaches were heavy with ice, and he was swinging a stiffly-frozen coiled rope.

Old Tom swerved to avoid the oncoming horse, but he couldn't move fast enough to duck the rope. It banged him alongside the head, filling his brain with red fire. He felt himself falling and in his ears was the bellow of this killer of the Wild Bunch—a paean that grew fainter and died away altogether as unconsciousness claimed him . . . .

"Hey, Butch! Good thing you had me lay back. This old badger was all set to drill you boys in the back, until I . . . ."

TOM. HOWDEN came back to consciousness with the impression that snow was melting and dripping on his face. In his ears was an insistent melody that seemed to strike into the middle of the black void that held him, that seemed to take hold of his innermost being and shake it as a terrier shakes a rat.

Moments before he opened his eyes, old Tom knew that melody for the ringing of a bell. The sheriff thought of eternity, but somehow it didn't wash. It was too real, too robust. Like a church bell, only there was a certain note of gladness there that could not be mistaken.

He spoke the word aloud: "Christmas!" And opened his eyes.

He lay in bed. He was warm and at ease. Above him loomed a blur of faces

—faces that became clear and that added to his amazement. His daughter's tears were falling upon his face and the lips of his wife were on his own. Behind their murmurs of gladness were staring men. Old Tom saw his sister's brother, in whose house he now knew he lay. And behind him, six grim-eyed, bearded men.

Tom's brother-in-law was smiling at him, murmuring: "Tom, these boys fetched Sarah an' the gal about the best Christmas present they ever got. An' to the men an' women an' children of Granite, they come as close to being Santy Claus as ever they'll know. We've give them the key to the town, includin' the one to the jail, where we had a friend of theirs cooped. An' the boys are 'lowin' that if you don't like the idea, you're welcome to try an' do somethin' about it."

Old Tom hardly heard him. He was looking at those notorious outlaws—six of them now instead of five. The sixth one, tall, gaunt and rawboned, he knew for the Merino Kid. They were all looking at him quizzically.

"I aim to do something about it," Tom said with an effort, "in the way of thanks. Whatever from hell made you come up here, Cassidy, when you had me down an' were plumb in the clear?"

Butch Cassidy grinned. "In the clear? Don't know what you mean, Sheriff. We were headed up here to spring a partner—nothin' else. An', long as we had to make the ride, we decided we could do no less than to bring up some good strong beef for starvin' women an' kids. An', when we found that star on yore boosum, we figgered it must be a purty good sheriff that would try to break his way to the aid of a starving town—alone!"

When he finished, there were tears in his eyes. And Tom Howden knew then that there are wolves—and wolves. Embarrassment came over the lawman.

"After which, boys," he said, "I feel plumb ashamed that I drawed down on you, back yonder. But when I thought of you takin' that beef down the desert road into a country where there ain't but little snow an' where you'd have a sure getaway; when I thought of all that good beef so near an' yet so far from folks that might be dyin' for it, I just went plumb loco. I hope you won't take it unkindly."

They swapped quick glances of surprise. Cassidy was grinning his Mick grin again.

"'Desert road . . . . Little snow . . . . Sure getaway'? I didn't know that, Sheriff. Thanks a whole lot an'—an' we'll all be seein' you!"

They were turning to the door when old Tom's missus moved to intercept them. With her hand on Cassidy's arm, she looked into the eyes of each. Then: "God bless each of you fine, good gentlemen!" she said. "Merry Christmas, and may you enjoy many of them!"

"Merry Christmas!" they murmured, and were gone.

* * *

An excerpt from a letter to Sheriff Thomas Howden, dated March 9th, 1904:

> . . . and as for failing to trap the Wild Bunch last December, don't let that worry you. I know that if there had been the ghost of a show, you would have put the deadwood on them. But Cassidy is clever and so daring as to upset our normal processes of law enforcement. I was not surprised to learn that he gave you the slip. He's done the same thing to me. . . . And will again!
>
> Sincerely,
> Kent Landon, Deputy.
> U.S. Marshal's Office,
> Cheyenne, Wyo.

For other dramatic stories of the real old-time West and the heroic men who made it, don't fail to read "The Leading Western Magazine"—DIME WESTERN! Next issue (November) is on your newsstand October 1st!

A CLANSMAN BRINGS

A nameless outcast from his own proud fighting kin, young Dode Castleman rode out alone, to learn in distant, feud-driven ranges, the frontier's grimmest lesson: That a man's never a man until he can take a licking—and then get up to fight again!

DODE CASTLEMAN was more than a little proud of himself as he rode home from Yellow Pine, recalling how he'd handled Keno Jack Ventros there. He kept admiring his shadow in the moonlight. His flashy, deep-chested bay seemed to feel the mood of its rider as it single-footed daintily up the moonlight-dappled trail. Yes, Keno Jack, the swaggering gambler-gunman

HIS OWN WAR

By Cliff Farrell

(Author of "Brand Him Killer!" etc.)

Action-packed, human novelette of a gunsmoke prodigal

He drew Stella close to him. . . .

hadn't seemed so tough, after Dode had made him crawfish. . . .

The hour was midnight, and Dode was surprised to see lights still burning in the ranchhouse. A man was glad to hit the soogans early at Castle ranch, as a rule, and only young Dode Castleman made a habit of nighthawking it to town.

However the shake-roofed bunkhouse was dark, proving that the riding crew was asleep. Dode put up his horse, and strolled to the house, his silver spur chains jingling.

The main house was a mellow, sprawling bulk against the background of incense cedars. The size and wealth of Castle, the pioneer outfit in the Pelican River country, was plain to see here, and Dode took complacent satisfaction in being a part of it.

He paused in surprise when he opened the door.

Dode's father, Lew Castleman, lean and weathered as an Indian, occupied his customary rawhide-slung armchair, a pipe clenched in his teeth. As he looked at his youngest son, his eyes were piercing and frosty.

Dode's four brothers were present at this unsual midnight gathering. Link, the eldest, lolled indolently against the mantel. Clum, the stocky one, who fell three inches short of the average family height, sat with socked feet propped on a table, toying with a banjo. It was hard to believe that Chum Castleman, lazy-mannered, good-natured, had proved more than once that he was hell on wheels in a gun-fight.

The twins, Tom and Jerry, who had been born in this room on a blizzardy Christmas morning more than twenty-five years before, sat with hats pushed back as they laboriously filled out entry blanks for the Cheyenne show. Tom and Jerry always made all the big cowboy rodeos.

It was a man's room, and a man's house, for Lew Castleman's wife had died when Dode was but a few days old. Antlers and pelts crowded the walls, along with prize saddles, guns, chaps, and all the motley equipment identified with the business of cattle ranching. The furniture was spur-scarred, the puncheon floor branded with countless cigarette burns.

Like their father, the four elder brothers had granite-gray, forceful jaws, and straight, black hair. But Dode's hair was like his mother's, corn-colored, and his eyes light blue. His sensitive features usually mirrored his thoughts.

Dode's father said evenly, "Evenin', Dode. We heard you had some trouble in town tonight?"

Dode's eyes flashed around the circle. "Nothin' that I'd call trouble," he said stiffly.

His father leaned forward, a frown on his forehead, and his tone sharpened. "The way we hear it you passed the lie to Keno Jack Ventros. Seems like yuh invited Keno to fill his hand, or git out o' town. Keno Jack has a rep as a killer, but you made him belly-crawl."

DODE was puzzled and uneasy. He had been proud of that achievement. But the stony faces of his kin subdued him. "Keno Jack had it comin'," he said defensively. "He was short-cardin' a drunken cowboy. I stood it as long as I could, then called him for it. He—"

"An' about a week ago you took a punch at Gar Bryant, that big range boss of the Hay Fork," his father interrupted. "Gar Bryant outweighs you forty pounds, an' is poison in a fist-fight. But he turned Injun when yuh hit him, an' walked away. You've made other hard-cased men step aside for you. You've started out to tame Yeller Pine."

Dode had a feeling that he was being cornered. "It was about time somebody brought out the streaks in windbags like Keno Jack and Gar Bryant," he said quickly. "They've been runnin' their bluff too long. Their fightin' ability was mostly imagination when it come down to cases."

"An' so you proved it single-handed?" his father persisted.

Dode was sweating. "Yes," he snapped impatiently.

His father shook his head. "Keno Jack Ventros wasn't skeered o' you Dode," he declared. "Nor was Bryant. Why should they be? You've never shown what you could do in a real ruckus—either with guns or fists. Men like them ain't in the habit of backin' down for a twenty-three-year-old dude cowboy."

Dode flushed. "But they did back down," he countered.

"Not from you, Dode. It was your brothers they were thinkin' of. That was yore ace in the hole. You've been dudin'

it around Yaller Pine, actin' the part of a tough town-tamer, an' the only thing that protected you was the fightin' reputation of your brothers."

Dode's tanned face was drained of color. "That's—that's not true," he blurted out hoarsely. "I'm able to take care of myself."

"You figure yo're a fightin' man, hey?" tough old Lew Castleman sneered. "So you took it on yourself to clean up the honkytonk line in town. We happen to be in the cow business out here at Castle, an' don't claim to be town-tamers. We fight when we're stepped on, but don't carry a chip on our shoulders. It's time you know what it means to go up against a man who won't back down."

The grim-eyed father turned to Link, his eldest. "Show him that he ain't quite as ringy as he figures, Link," he ordered.

Link unsmilingly produced a set of four-ounce boxing gloves, and tossed a pair across the room at Dode's feet. "Put on the mitts, kid," he said. "You won't be marked up so much with gloves."

Chum and the twins began pushing furniture back against the walls. Link pulled off his shirt and boots. Stripped to the waist he looked bigger. His muscles were long and smooth, tapering flatly down from his shoulders. Link had once sparred an exhibition match with Jim Corbett at a cowboy celebration, and Corbett had afterwards urged him to make the prize ring his profession. But Link was a cowman, and had laughed at the thought of trying for the heavyweight championship.

Dode stared scornfully. "You're all drunk or loco," he jeered. "I'm in no mood for a boxing lesson tonight. I'm going to bed."

"Put on the gloves," Link advised curtly. "This is no boxing lesson. I'm going to whale you 'till you slobber for mercy."

They all were eyeing him as they would a calf about to be branded, and with as little sympathy. In Dode a hot anger began to seethe. His father, whom he idolized, had branded him as a dude and a four-flusher. His brothers, by their silence, had agreed.

Dode suddenly tossed aside his beaver hat, stripped off his gaudy gingham shirt and scrolled boots. He pulled on the gloves, and Chum laced them on his wrists.

DODE had sparred with Link many times but that had been all in fun, with both of them pulling their punches. Dode had often wondered if Link was really as poisonous with his fists as men said. Now, spurred by resentment, he meant to find out. Deep in his mind, was a hunch that he could whip Link.

"Ready," Link warned, and came moving in.

Dode stepped up, and they circled each other, feinting for an opening, while the father and three brothers watched in silence.

Dode saw his chance, and weaved in, sending a left hook with everything he had behind it. It was in his mind to end this in a hurry. But Link's jaw was not there when the punch arrived. Dode tried to cover up, but he was too late. Link caught him with a left hook that sent a shock down to his heels. He backed off, blinking, but Link followed him relentlessly. To Dode his brother seemed like a stranger. Link looked bleak and business-like.

"Stand up and fight, you shadow-ridin' dude!" Link jeered.

Dode shook off the effects of that punch and rushed in, swinging furiously. A stiff left to the chin stopped him, followed by a right to the body that sent a leaden weight down into his stomach. He tried to keep moving in, but Link drove him back with short jabs that carried explosive power.

Dode fought in silence. His eyes were

beginning to shine glassily, and his mouth was open, gasping. But he kept boring in. Link measured him and sent him to the floor with a crashing right.

Dode dragged himself to his feet. He could taste blood in his mouth, and his lips felt unnaturally big. One eye was nearly closed, and the room seemed to spin drunkenly. Link's face was a mere tantalizing shadow in front of him. He swung a desperate punch at that grinning face.

Once more Link knocked him down. And again. The fourth time when Dode tried to arise, he suddenly slumped face down on the floor. He was out. . . .

Link stepped back with a sigh. "I'm damned glad that's over!" he muttered.

One of the twins sloshed a bucket of water over Dode. After a time he sat up. His father was eyeing him thoughtfully.

"Still figure you could whip a man like Gar Bryant?" Lew Castleman asked curtly.

Dode used a chair to help pull himself erect. He peered around from his one good eye. Link had donned his shirt, and was rolling a smoke. They all stared at him impersonally.

It was true then. The tough customers he had braced in Yellow Pine had not knuckled to him personally. He hadn't been standing on his own legs. He had been backed up by the fighting reputation of his family.

It was crushingly clear to Dode that he had been shown up as a four-flusher and a braggart. Link hardly showed a mark of the encounter. Dode flinched as he wondered what a man like Gar Bryant, who was master of all the brutal methods of rough-and-tumble fighting, would have done to him.

"You were right, Dad" he admitted hoarsely. "I don't fit in around Castle. I ain't needed here, I reckon. I'll be ridin' in the mornin'."

Lew Castleman offered no protest. "There'll be a place for you when you come back, Dode," he said quietly.

Dode laughed bitterly, hoarsely. "Come back?" he jeered. "I'll never have the gall to show my face in Yellow Pine again. You made it plumb clear what everybody thinks of me."

He walked unsteadily to his sleeping quarters, and they heard the door close. The brothers stirred.

"You were a little tough on the kid, Dad," Chum protested. "He's broken-hearted. He thinks he's yellow."

"Every man has to learn that he can be licked," Lew Castleman pointed out. "The way the world is made, sometimes you lose, and sometimes you win. Dode had an idea that he couldn't lose. Bein' the baby in the family he's been coddled too much. He's spoiled an' proud. He'll learn to stand on his own legs, an' then he'll come back."

"I got a hundred an' a silver-mounted saddle that says he'll take Link to a hell of a cleanin' when he does come back!" the Jerry twin predicted.

"I ain't coverin' it," Link grinned. "I licked him this time, because he was mad an' over-confident. He hits like a mule. All he needs is experience. I'd hate to be the man he practices on."

Young Dode Castleman did not sleep much that night. He lay staring up into the darkness, prey of humiliation and self-reproach. All his brothers had proved themselves worthy of the Castleman fighting reputation, but he felt that he had been shown up as a failure and a weakling.

He rode away the next morning, his warbag on his saddle, tight-lipped, and with only a casual farewell. He dared not look back, for in spite of everything a lump rose in his throat. He did chance one glance before the cedars shut out the sight of the familiar old ranch house. He never expected to see it again. He remembered afterward that his father, lean

and elemental-looking in his saddle garb, was standing there watching him go.

Afterward seamy old Lew Castleman walked back alone into the living room, which the Chink cook had finished straightening up. He stood looking up at the picture of the sweet-faced woman over the mantel.

"I shoved another one out'n the nest to try his wings, Mary," he whispered as though making a confession. "It ain't the way you'd have done it, I reckon, but it's the only way I know."

CHAPTER TWO

Till the Last Man Dies!

THE first thing Dode Castleman did was to change his name. He called himself Bob Smith, as he followed the calf branding north out of Wyoming into the Missouri River country. The name of Castleman was known all over cow-country, and he made up his mind that he wouldn't lean on it, no matter what came. He winced every time he thought of how he had strutted around Yellow Pine, glorying in his self-assumed role as a town-tamer.

"By rights I should be holdin' up six feet o' ground," he reflected morosely, thinking of how he had challenged Keno Jack, the gunman.

He caught jobs at roundups here and there. A man riding calf roundup was in the saddle before the morning star had burned out, ready to swing the first circle, and to sweat through the smoke and dust of the branding work, bulldogging and heeling until the late spring darkness called a halt. Dode earned his forty a month and found, and every wagon boss who hired him offered him a steady place on the payroll. But Dode had restless feet.

A barkeeper in Wagonbow, the hub of the Lost Hills cattle range, directed him to the wagons which were working a roundup. It was a chill, drizzling morning when he located them.

Sheathed in his slicker, with his hat brim dripping cold rain, he paused his horse among junipers and appraised the roundup camp in a mountain basin below. There were five chuckwagons. He could hear distant yells and the crashing of brush around. The first morning circle was in operation.

A swing of riders was working toward him, popping stock from the brushy flanks of a shallow, open draw to his left. He sighted them intermittently—storm-clad cowboys, mud-caked, and saddle-bored, who risked their necks every minute on the rainswept, boulder-studded mountainside.

Cattle were beginning to stream down the draw ahead of the circle. Dode read half a dozen brands, all unfamiliar to him, and noticed approvingly that the percentage of she-stuff with calves ran high.

A burly rider, with a week's bristle of sand-colored whiskers matting his wedge-shaped jaws, passed within a dozen rods of Dode without noticing him there among the timber. The rider had his name, Herk Stine, painted on the back of his yellow slicker.

A line-back cow, with a calf at her heels, broke from the brush ahead of the big cowboy. His horse automatically pivoted to turn the cow, but the rider kneed the animal away. The cow, with the slick-eared calf, plunged on up a slant, heading back into the hills. Dode read the escaping animal's brand. It was a Double Diamond.

Dode frowned. Steers and barren cows were being allowed to escape the oncoming circle, but no rider worthy of his salt would refuse to turn an unbranded calf.

He glimpsed two more cows with calves following that slipped through the cordon of riders. They also wore Double

Diamonds. The swing of riders moved past out of sight down the draw. Dode noticed that here and there in the gather they were driving were Double Diamond cows with calves. Not all of that brand were being turned back.

Dode grinned faintly, with scorn. It was a time-worn method of mavericking a neighbor's calf-crop. These cowboys were gathering only enough Double Diamonds to make a showing, but allowing the majority to sift back into the hills. Later when the slick calves had weaned, they'd likely be adorned with some other man's brand. It was a low-down method of thievery, difficult to prove, and harder to detect.

Dode suddenly stirred his horse into action. The big bay was a trained bush popper, and within thirty minutes Dode had gathered a dozen Double Diamond cows with calves that had been turned back by the circle.

He drifted them down the draw to the grass basin where the roundup wagons were camped. There the day herd was accumulating as other swing crews arrived from the hills and canyons with their morning's gather.

AS he came up with his small bunch, he saw the brawny, sandy-whiskered rider lift in the stirrups and glare. And another man, middle-aged, stocky, and grim-featured, with biting black eyes, came riding up fast, staring at the cattle.

"What's this?" he demanded gruffly.

"One of the swings missed quite a few head up in the big draw back there," Dode remarked casually. "I was headin' this-away, so I brought a few of 'em along."

"They're all Double Diamonds," the stocky man said with a snap of his jaws. "I'm Bill White, owner of that brand. Who're you, young feller?"

"Name of Bob Smith. I'm in the market for a ridin' job. Kinda odd that it was only your brand they overlooked. Wasn't any of your friends ridin' that swing?"

Their gaze met significantly. The whiskery cowboy came up. There was a hard glitter in his little, yellow-brown eyes.

"Anything wrong, White?" he demanded casually.

Bill White sat in the saddle with thumbs hooked in his cartridge belt. "Plenty, Herk," he answered, and the burr in his voice aroused Dode to the deadly tension in the air. "This stranger brings in a bunch of my she-stuff with calf that he says your crew overlooked up in Black Rock draw. I've had a feelin' for a week that every gather you Stines brought in wasn't runnin' up to average on Double Diamond brands."

More chap-clad men were quitting the herd, and converging on the group. Two blunt-featured, clean-cut cowboys ranged themselves at Bill White's side, their lips stony.

Half a dozen riders lined up with Herk Stine. They all had yellowish-brown eyes, and a similar sallow sharpness in their features. It was plain they all came from the same family stock.

Herk Stine weighed his answer. "We might have missed a few," he remarked with pointed sarcasm. "It's a rough country up there."

"Seems like you only missed my Double Diamond stuff," Bill White answered harshly. "That needs explainin'."

A girl wearing a slicker over jeans and little mud-stained cowboots, spurred a spotted pony between them. Dode saw that her soggy felt hat held on her dark hair with a hat pin.

She was pale, and breathing fast. "It was a mistake, Dad," she exclaimed pleadingly. "Forget it. It's easy to miss cattle in the brush, what with the rain and fog. And this stranger might not have come down the same draw through which the Stines handled that swing."

She had sloe-black eyes, and a healthy,

softly tanned, firmly-mounded face. The damp wisps of hair that strayed from under her hat were dark and lustrous.

She turned around in the saddle to give Dode a cold, hostile glance. "You might have been mistaken, you know."

"Or told a damned lie!" Herk Stine spat scornfully.

The girl nodded. "Or lied," she echoed calmly.

Dode went sultry. He ignored the girl. "When you call a man a liar it's customary to back it up with something, Stine," he said in a queer sing-song.

A heavy silence clapped down. Herk Stine's tough, shrewd face took on a sudden metallic blankness, and he edged his heavy body around. Dode set himself to match the flash draw that he knew Stine was working up to.

But again the girl intervened, forcing her horse between them. "No fighting," she implored. "Let it drop. Forget it. It was all a mistake! Dad, Orv, Mel! Get away from here. Take this—this trouble-maker with you."

Herk Stine shrugged and let his muscular body slacken. "Yo're runnin' in luck, feller," he said hoarsely. "I can't gut-shoot you with a girl present. She's too purty to watch a thing like that."

"There's plenty of room back in the hills," Dode responded icily. "Just you an' me alone."

"No!" the girl panted frantically. "Stop it, I say! There's been enough of that. Too much!"

Herk Stine shot an admiring glance at her. "I won't kill him, Stella," he agreed. "But he needs curryin' some. He thinks he's tough."

Stine dismounted, and shed his gunbelt with a flourish. "'Fess up thet you lied about them cattle, or be ready to have it rammed down your throat, you wet-eared dude," he sneered. "I wouldn't waste a bullet on you. I'll jest slap you around with my bare hands."

Dode's mind flashed back to that night at Castle when his brother Link had taken him to a trimming without even raising a sweat. A pang of wistfulness shot through him, thinking of his brothers. He'd never written them, of course, but. . . . His eyes measured Herk Stine, bigger than Link by ten pounds, and nail-hard as a grizzly.

A cold knot formed in Dode's stomach. He had been whipped once, and he remembered how it felt. He fought off that shrinking doubt, and slid to the ground. Stripping off his slicker and hat, he hung his six-shooter on the saddlehorn.

In the background grim-eyed Bill White made a move to intercede, but his daughter caught his arm appealingly, and held him back.

HERK STINE looked bigger than ever afoot, and he moved around lightly in spite of his size.

He wore a cold, twisted smile as Dode moved up. Then he rushed in with a growl of anticipation.

Dode was playing a lone hand now. There were no Castlemans in the background to overawe Herk Stine. He was thinking of that as he met the rush of the tawny-eyed big man. He felt the drugging force of Stine's fist, landing solidly on his body. He sent two short, chopping punches to the flat, heavy face, and felt momentary surprise when he saw Stine fall back a step.

Stine grunted, and came in again, cursing, but there was no longer that leer of confidence. He sent two ponderous, whistling punches that Dode rolled off harmlessly. In return Dode sank a fist into Stine's short ribs, and heard the man's breath gush forth painfully.

Stine again fell back, but Dode followed him, bringing up a right hook to the jaw. Herk Stine seemed to stumble over an invisible obstruction, and sat down suddenly on his haunches.

In the background Bill White was standing in his stirrups, his eyes shining. "Finish him, feller!" White gritted.

But Dode was oblivious of this encouragement. Herk Stine had slowed up. He retreated slowly from Dode, wagging his head like a stunned bull. He had stopped cursing, and his eyes were shining. Dode followed him, seeking an opening.

Then Stine rushed in with sudden, explosive speed. He swung a punch at Dode, who ducked to evade it. That blow was a ruse. Dode saw his mistake too late. Stine reversed his balance in a flash, and brought up a booted foot. It caught Dode in the pit of the stomach. For an instant he felt nothing, then nausea swept over him. He tried to swing at Stine who was rushing upon him with a savage snarl. But his muscles had turned flabby.

Stine's big fist crashed on his unprotected jaw, and sent him reeling. The big man followed, driving punches to Dode's wabbling head. The slicker-clad girl moaned and covered her eyes.

Dode was out on his feet. He swayed, then fell forward on his face. For the second time in his life he had been taken to a cleaning.

Stine, blood-mad, leaped in to finish the job with his boots. "I'll make this dude sorry he ever—" he shouted.

But the girl left her horse with frenzied speed and caught Stine's arm. "Don't! You've won. That's enough."

Stine started to shake her off, then paused, and looked down at her, a slow thick grin working into his battered face.

"Anythin' you say, Stella," he murmured confidentially to her. "I'm always keen to do you a favor. You know that."

She drew her hand abruptly away, and a momentary weariness appeared in her face. Then she quelled it. "Thank you Herk," she said huskily. "I want no more trouble between our families. I'm depending on you to help end that old grudge."

CHAPTER THREE

Daughter of Feud

DODE revived to find himself lying under the protection of a tarp stretched from a chuckwagon. A sun-cured cowboy, with a tough, battle-scarred face and cauliflower ears, was squatting beside him. He grinned at Dode.

"I took you in hand, cowboy," he said. "I'm Brick Teal."

"I got licked again," Dode muttered, sitting up.

"You had him whipped, then fell for a dirty trick that nobody but a Stine would use," Brick Teal snorted. "Yo're the only man that ever stayed that long with Herk Stine. An' if you ever take him on ag'in I want to be around to enjoy it. I don't figure Stine will be any too anxious to trade punches with you another time, though. He's wearing a black eye an' he lost some teeth. He won the fight, but a couple more victories like that would finish him."

The roundup work had been resumed. The smell of burned hair and sizzling branding irons came to Dode.

Brick Teal deliberately rolled a smoke.

"You damned near popped the lid off'n hell, feller," he declared quietly. "Ever hear of the White-Stein feud down in Texas?"

Dode nodded. "Yeah." Then he looked at Brick Teal with sudden amazement. "You don't mean . . . ?"

"Yeah. Thet feud started in Tennessee so many years back that not even the Whites an' Stines know what caused it. It moved to Texas when both families started cattle ranchin' there, about thirty years ago. Accordin' to what folks say, more'n three hundred people has been killed durin' the course of that damn feud. Then, five years ago the last of the Whites, numberin' one man an' his

two sons and a daughter, decided to give up the fight. They pulled out of Texas an' disappeared.

"There was a lot o' Stines left though, who wasn't nowise satisfied to end the feud as long as any White was still alive. They finally located Bill White way up here in Montana. Herk Stine an' a bunch of his brothers an' cousins moved into the Lost Hills country six months ago, an' bought a ranch right next to the Whites. Since then, the Stines have been doin' everything they can think of tuh prod the Whites into war—which would mean wipe-out for the last of the Whites."

Dode was staring. "That's why—"

"That's why they mavericked them Double Diamond calves. An' that's why Stella White did her best to make out that you had lied or made a mistake. She tried to hang the blame on you so as to prevent the shoot-up from comin' right then an' there. She's doin' everything in her power to keep the peace. She knows the Stines want to crowd her men into makin' the first break. Then the Stines will wipe 'em out, an' claim the Whites was the aggressors."

"And I blundered along, thinking I was helping some cowman who was being mavericked!" Dode said wryly. "I played right into Herk Stine's hands."

"Yeah," Buck Teal said grimly. "You didn't help matters none. But don't hold it ag'in Stella White—and forget about them mavericked calves."

Dode morosely felt of his bruised face. Once more he had made a fool of himself, plunging into trouble that did not concern him.

The Lost Hills roundup ended that day, and at sundown the camp broke up, the wagons stringing out for their home ranches.

Dode rode away with Brick Teal. "I got a little sidehill cow-claim up along the benches," Teal told him. "You're welcome to hang up yore spurs there, Smith."

Brick Teal had taken care of Dode's horse after the fist fight, and he didn't mention that he had noticed the name and ranch address that Dode had branded on the underside of the jockey skirt. Brick Teal had punched cattle at Castle when Dode was a tow-headed child of five.

Dode's eyes were swollen nearly shut. He was unable to see the black scowl with which Herk Stine watched him pull out. Nor did he see the way Stella White looked back at him, with tears of regret and self-reproval in her sloe-black eyes as she drove the Double Diamond wagon out of the roundup camp.

BRICK TEAL had a log shack among the alder-bordered creek.

"I could handle my fists in my day," Brick told Dode modestly. "I fought in the ring for a couple of years. Jake Kilrain it was that give me this crooked nose. An' John L. himself handed me one of these cabbage ears—but it was in a barroom that John L. an' me fought. I could give you a few pointers on fightin' that might come in handy the next time you bump up ag'in Herk Stine."

"What makes you think I want to get myself beat up again?" Dode asked morosely.

But he stayed on at Brick Teal's little ranch, taking the rough off half a dozen young horses that Brick had added to his string, and helping with the first crop of wild hay.

Evenings, Dode and Brick put on the gloves and sparred on the grass bank above the creek. But one night after supper, Brick pushed back his chair from the home-made table and loaded his pipe.

He began to talk of the days when he was riding grub-line, a tumble-weeding puncher down in Texas. And in the

course of his conversation, Dode's eyes narrowed reflectively. It seemed almost as if Brick was describing the Castle ranch, and his father and brothers. Yet, Brick was wary enough to mention no names, and to disguise the Castleman spread just enough so that Dode wouldn't guess that he'd actually known them.

Nevertheless, that set Dode to thinking, harder than he ever had before. It seemed to the youngster that, in exiling himself from his family, he'd cut himself off from something pretty fine. Even before he'd left Texas, he told himself, he'd learned his lesson, and it was only a matter of pride that had sent him out that night, under the steel-hard gaze of old Lew Castleman.

Perhaps Brick saw the effect his reminiscences were having on Dode. He reached up, tossed a pair of gloves to Dode, and laid down his pipe. "Come on," he challenged. "I'll make a heavyweight champion of you in three years!"

As they walked back after that hot session, Dode shook his head. "There's only one man I want to lick," he grinned. He was thinking of his brother Link.

Maybe Link could lick him again—but even so, it would be worth the licking, just to see that lean, familiar figure ride up again. Oh, hell. . . . Here he was gettin' moony for his own bloodkin again! And that night, tossing in his bunk, he dreamed that he had come home and was happier than he ever had been, working with his brothers and the gaunt Lew, on their own range, with their own stock. . . .

Brick had gone to town with the spring wagon for a load of supplies, and Dode was working under the hot noon sun with one of the young horses, training it for roping, when he looked up to find a visitor watching. It was the sloe-eyed girl, Stella White.

Dode dismounted, and doffed his hat curtly, then waited non-committally for her to speak. She drew a deep breath, and nodded as though answering something that had not been voiced.

"I know," she said softly. "I accused you of lying, and got you into a fight with Herk Stine. I don't blame you for looking at me like that. I've been wanting to come and explain, but didn't—well, I just didn't have the courage until today."

"Brick told me all about what a damned fool I made of myself," he said. "I'll learn some day to mind my own affairs."

She stepped down from her horse. Her fluffy, rich dark hair came just on a level with his eyes. She wore a tan riding skirt, and a cool, white shirtwaist. She was vitally alive, womanly and gentle. Dode felt a sudden longing to touch her.

"I hope you're not thinking of—of fighting Herk Stine again," she said pleadingly. "Please don't! Even if you beat him, it wouldn't end there. The rest of the Stines would take it up. Herk has brothers and cousins with him. The Stines are vindictive and clannish. They never forget a grudge."

Unknowingly Dode then repeated something his father had once said. "Maybe that's because they don't know how it feels to be whipped," he remarked. "A man ain't so anxious to fight after he's been shown that he can't always win."

She sighed. "But they've always won. They're stronger than the Whites, and always have been. We're not afraid of them, but we do want peace. And they'll never be satisfied until dad and my brothers are dead."

She came closer and extended her hand. "You have every right to dislike me," she said softly. "But I—I don't want you to."

Color deepened in her cheeks, and her lashes drooped. She turned away, and hastily swung into the saddle.

"Adios!" she said. She rode away, turning at last to lift her arm. There was

something wistful in the gesture. Not until she had vanished among the trees did Dode realize that she had meant it as a final farewell to him.

Suddenly he did not want it so. He had to see this girl again. He stood a moment, than ran to the corral, rigged his bay horse and set out after her.

He had covered more than a mile, and was ducking sweeper branches in the deep shadow of cedars, when he heard Stellla White scream out ahead.

He rounded a stand of boulders into view. She had been dragged from her horse and was struggling in the arms of a big man who was grinning, avid-eyed It was Herk Stine!

STINE looked up as he heard the pound of hoofs. He hurled the girl away and clawed frantically for his gun.

Dode's boots hit the ground running, and he was upon Stine before the gun lifted. His fist caught Stine flush on the jaw. The punch drove Stine reeling, and he thudded heavily on his back. He came to his feet shakily, blood streaming from his face. He tried to draw his gun again, but Dode knocked it from his hands, sending it spinning twenty feet away.

"Please," Stella White panted frantically. "No more fighting."

Dode did not even hear her. He began working Herk Stine over with his fists. The big man fought like an enraged bull for a time, but within seconds his snarling face was a twisted, gory mask under the relentless impact of Dode's fists. Stine had met his master. His wild swings could not find Dode now.

Panic swept Stine. He brushed blood from his eyes and chanced a quick glance around. He located his six-shooter which lay half-buried in the trampled dust.

Suddenly he changed tactics and began backing hurriedly away from Dode. "I've had enough," he whined. "Stay away from me, damn you!"

Dode, panting, blood trickling from a cut lip, followed him slowly.

Stine backed to where his gun lay, and in spite of himself a mad flicker of murderous triumph crossed his face.

Dode saw his danger, and so did Stella. "The gun!" she screamed. "Look out!"

Dode was already moving to meet that crisis. His own six-shooter had remained in the holster throughout the melee, but it had slipped around to the back of his belt, out of quick reach.

He leaped aside, clawing for it, as Stine snatched up his own gun. "Now!" Stine screeched, and snapped a shot at Dode.

Dode was moving, and the slug only brushed the front of his shirt. His own gun came into his hand, and he tripped the hammer as he flipped it up.

Like a broken doll, Herk Stine doubled at the waist. He gasped in agony, turned, took a dazed stride, then plunged forward on his face, twisting a moment and then going still. Dode knew he was dead.

Dode straightened slowly, his face gray. He had whipped a man; he had killed a man. He knew as he stood there that he at least was no coward, and that he could stand alone. And dimly he understood that this was the lesson his father had sent him out to learn.

Stella White was staring, white-faced, at Stine's body, and Dode touched her, breaking that horrible spell. She began to sob then, and swayed. He placed an arm around her to steady her.

A hoarse shout sounded, and two riders burst from the timber. They threw back their horses, taking in the scene. They were Stines. There was no mistaking the characteristic tawny-brown eyes, and coarse, rope-colored hair.

Dode moved the girl behind him, and covered them with his gun. "Stand there," he rasped. "An' lift your arms."

They obeyed grudgingly. "So you got Herk," one of them, thin-necked and pock-marked, spat savagely. "I always

knowed that schemin' girl was only leadin' my brother on to his death, with her smiles an' peace talk. She had Herk almost believin' that she was in love with him. Now we find her in the arms of a killer, right beside Herk's corpse."

A grim realization struck Dode. Here was the spark that would rekindle the smouldering feud, and sweep this girl and her remaining kin to their deaths.

He laughed suddenly. "I'm not giving credit to the Whites for rubbing out that big skunk," he said harshly. "I've been layin' for him to square up for that beatin' he gave me. I waited until I found him here with his girl. Maybe I'll take her with me when I ride. If she was in love with him, I'll soon make her forget—"

Stella White stepped forward. "He's not telling the truth," she said tonelessly. "He's only trying to brand himself as a murderer in the hope of shielding the Whites. I've done everything I can to bring about peace, even to the point of trying to be friendly with a low-down brute like Herk Stine. I won't let an innocent man take the blame. Herk Stine waylaid me here. I was trying to fight him off when Bob Smith came up. Stine tried to kill him, and Bob Smith only fired to save his own life."

"A tall story," the scrawny one gritted. "You lured Herk here so he could be murdered. I'm Lope Stine, the brother of the man that lays there dead. Before the Almighty, I swear that all you damned Whites will follow him down the same trail before sundown."

"I tell you—" Dode began hoarsely.

She touched his arm. "It's no use," she said, low-voiced. "This is the excuse they've been waiting for. Nothing can stop them now."

DODE knew she was right. He stood an instant in bleak silence. Then he motioned with his gun. "Take your brother's body, an' ride. If it's war you're thirsty for, I'll try to give you enough to satisfy you. They say you Stines don't ever forget a grudge, an' never know when to quit. You'll be taught some day. Start your feud. I'm takin' a hand in it, and if I go under, there'll be more like me to pick up where I left off."

The pair grimly rounded up Herk Stine's horse, tied the body across the saddle, and rode away.

Dode looked at the girl. "There's time to warn your folks," he said tersely. "They can pull out before the Stines come after 'em."

She shook her head wearily. "They won't run again," she stated. "I argued them into leaving Texas, and they thought that was a cowardly thing to do. They won't let the Stines drive them from Montana also."

Dode brought up the horses, lifted her into the saddle, and mounted at her side. "I brought this on the Whites," he remarked. "And I'm seeing it through!"

"It would have come sooner or later, anyway," she denied. "It isn't your fault, nor is it your fight. I want you to pull out. There's nothing to hold you here."

Dode lifted her chin and made her face him. "You're the one who will always hold me, wherever you are," he told her slowly. "Is there any chance for me?"

"There's—there's no one else," she said softly.

They rode on side by side, striking down the bench trail that she said would lead them to her father's ranch.

Brick Teal hove in sight, returning from town with the loaded wagon. Brick's grin of greeting froze when he came close enough to see their faces.

"I killed Herk Stine a while ago," Dode explained tersely. "The Stines know about it, and are going to open up the war with the Whites. I'm throwing in with Bill White."

He bent closer, speaking into Brick's ear. "If I don't pull through, you'll find

a couple of letters in my warbag that show my real name and home ranch, Brick. Let 'em know what happened to me. An' you might tell 'em that I've learned to stand on my own legs."

He shook hands with Brick, and rode on at Stella White's side. As soon as they were out of sight the knotty-faced old prize fighter pulled his rig off the trail, hiding it in the brush. He took one of the tough-mouthed sorrels out of harness, mounted it with only a hackamore for rigging, and clamped his knees tight as he headed across country back to the town of Wagonbow.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ten Seconds to Live

DODE and the girl rode up to the log-built, grass-topped Double Diamond ranch house, which stood amid scattered clumps of lodgepole and alder. Bill White was working at the forge, hammering a glowing horseshoe. He stared, then doffed his apron, and came striding grimly.

Stella's voice was tense as she explained what had happened.

Her father's face pinched down to stony bleakness. "It had to come," he said bitterly, and walked to the house and pulled the rope of a cowbell over the door. The brazen clangor drifted out over the flats, and soon Stella's two brothers came loping in from the range.

The brothers were older than Stella. Orv White at thirty, was a lank, taciturn man, with bleak memories in his dark eyes. Mel White was stockier, with square, stubborn features.

The brothers accepted the situation in silence. Dode saw that they had long expected this call to arms. Feud-fighting was their heritage, and Dode sensed a fatalism in their manner as they began preparations. Suddenly he realized that the Whites considered themselves doomed.

"This ain't your fight, Smith," Orv White told Dode. "Pull out while you've got the chance. There are twenty or more o' the Stines, an' this house is goin' to be a slice of red hell before many more hours. I know what we're in for. They're too many for us."

"I'm making it my fight," Dode said.

Something clipped the casing of a window, hurling a burst of cedar splinters across the room, and the savage wail of a glancing bullet mingled with the distant snap of a rifleshot.

Dode turned, and pushed Stella White into a corner by the stone fireplace.

"They're here," her father said tonelessly. "They didn't waste any time."

As Dode straightened, a bullet jerked at the peak of his hat. Window glass crashed all around the house, and the drone and wail of bullets filled the room. A dozen or more rifles had opened up on the house from four sides.

As though it had been pre-arranged, the Whites took positions that commanded the surroundings. They had a plentiful supply of guns and ammunition, and there was water and food in the house. They could stand a siege, Dode believed.

Then Dode chanced a glimpse from a window. He saw spurts of flame winking briefly from rocks and gullies and from the protection of trees at a distance. He pumped two shots at one of the concealed attackers, and in savage reply, a storm of bullets crashed around him. He felt a crease sting his head and ducked back.

"Yellow-bellied cowards," he said grimly. "They're lying out there, smoking us up at long range."

"They'll come closer after dark," Bill White predicted grimly.

Dode found himself struggling to resist the fatalistic mood of the Whites. Their acceptance of certain death aroused a helpless anger in him. "If they do, we'll shoot 'em to doll rags!" he grated. "They can't whip us. We'll put the fear in 'em."

How different, Dode thought, from the way his own clan would react to this. There was, in the Castleman tribe, some indomitable, fighting quality that would never give up. And again, Dode was conscious of a bitter pang of loneliness, of separation that called wordlessly for his brothers and his grim bleak-eyed father, who would never admit defeat while there was breath left in their bodies.

A bullet pierced a chink in the log wall, hurling a shower of dried mud around the room. Bill White, squatting under a window, twisted slowly. He came to his feet, his body wrenched back in agony, then began to fall.

Dode leaped and eased him to the floor. Stella emitted one low cry of grief which she suppressed quickly. She knelt and lifted her father's head into her lap.

Bill White's contorted lips framed a few, gasping, ironical words. "They got me," he said. "The Stines got me, like they did all the rest of the Whites. Damn 'em! They're too tough,—too—"

Bill White's voice faded, and his head slumped back. He had met the doom that he had always considered inevitable. Born to feud, reared in the ways of internecine strife, he died in the manner that he had always accepted as his destiny.

Stella carried that same fatalism in her expression. "That's the way they all go." The travail of her soul in her eyes wrenched Dode's heart. "And now, even the man I've fallen in love with is going to go the same way."

Dode looked at her. "The man you—love?" he questioned huskily.

She nodded, and a ghost of a smile, wistful and forlorn, came to her lips. "Yes," she said, and her eyes did not waver. "I love you."

Their lips met for an instant. Afterwards Dode crouched by a wall, firing at intervals through a slit he had punched in the chinking, and the will to live was an all-consuming flame within him. It did not seem to him that death could be near for a man and a woman who had found in each other such a dream of the future. And his spirit reached Stella and her brothers. The acceptance of defeat faded, and there was an atmosphere of hope within the besieged house.

But there was nothing on which to pin hope. The Stines battered the house with lead as the afternoon dragged by. A bullet scored Dode's left arm toward sundown, and Stella bandaged that, as she had his creased head. Mel White had already received two deep flesh wounds.

Tears ran down Stella's cheeks. "My dear!" she breathed hopelessly. "My dear! Why did you come here—to die?"

THE Stines remained hidden, pouring their relentless fire at long range upon the house. The long twilight began to creep out from the mountain canyons. What damage their return fire had done to the Stines Dode was unable to guess. Little, if any, he judged.

The interior of the house was a bullet-torn ruin. The Stines knew the effects of such a sustained, galling fire on human nerves. It would be easy to go berserk under such a test, and Dode found himself fighting off the impulse more than once to race out there in an attempt to get at hand-to-hand grips with them.

Once Orv White, cursing, with madness in his eyes, started for the door. But Dode stopped him.

"That's what they want us to do! It's suicide. They'd riddle you inside of ten yards. Wait! Let 'em come to us."

As the deepening twilight shortened the visibility, the Stines crept in closer. For the first time in the fight, one of the Stines raised a taunting shout. "Come out an' fight like men!" he yelled. "Come out, or we'll burn you out."

Dode thought of the bear grass thatch on the roof above them, and a twinge of grim dismay struck at him.

Darkness came, and the Stines were all around the house like creeping snakes, discernible only by a vague, maddening rustle of undergrowth in the deep shadows. The defenders fired at the sounds, but all that it gained them was the crash of bullets and taunting yells in return.

Dode knew that a concerted rush was coming in an attempt to fire the house. The grass roof would be a tinder box.

He drew Stella close to him and kissed her, trading a hot-barrelled empty rifle for a loaded six-shooter. "We did our best, honey," he said gently.

"You didn't deserve to die like this," she breathed miserably.

"I'm here with you," he told her. "That's where I belong."

The Stines opened up suddenly with every gun at close range. Outside, Dode made out a man who was igniting a bundle of soaked rags. It looked like the one who had called himself Lope Stine. Behind him, another shadowed figure was keeping up a steady fire into the house. Dode fired, and the man with the torch fell, the match flickering out.

But at other points flaming bundles of grass or rags were being thrown at the house. Some fell short—but not all. With a crackle the grass roof suddenly ignited.

A layer of sod under the thatching would protect them for a few minutes, but the fire would eventually spread to the walls. The house was doomed.

The Stines were yelling with the savage anticipation of wolves as they fell back from the flames to cover, to await the appearance of their quarry.

"You were right," Dode said reluctantly. "They were too many for us. It's time to go—out there."

Stella kissed him. "We'll go out together," she said steadily.

THE brother stood there with them, and they steeled themselves as they paused at the door. They knew they were going to their death. Orv White lifted the bar, and reached to trip the latch and open the door.

As he did so Dode's head lifted. "Listen!" he cried out, and pulled Orv White back.

They all heard it now—the drum of galloping hoofs. Then a wild cowboy yell, primitive and freighted with fury, sounded, and was echoed by other throats. Guns began coughing, the booming of oncoming hoofs filled the night.

Dode leaped to a window. The flaming roof lighted the scene in flickering crimson radiance. He saw riders sweeping from the trees and the Stines were breaking from covert like flushed rabbits in the face of that charge.

Guns painted quick, violent smears of orange, and here and there scuttling feudists were falling.

Dode's hand closed on Stella White's arm. "Look!" he rasped incredulously. "See 'em! *Castle* riders! *Castle* riders! The whole damned cow-crew! There's my dad, the lean, hawk-beaked one. An' my brothers. God help the Stines now!" He turned and raced out.

A tall horseman loomed up, and raised a wild shout of exultation. It was Link Castleman, shouting his discovery that his youngest brother was still alive.

Dode lifted his gun, then lowered it. The Stines were throwing down their weapons, lifting their hands, and shouting their surrender in frenzied appeal. Half of their numbers were down, dead or dying. Hard-bitten cowboys threw lariats over the captives and dragged them ignominiously into a heap.

The White brothers came from the burning house, bringing their father's body. And old Lew Castleman, sweating, and the battle light still flaming in his eyes, rode up and dismounted.

He stood eyeing Dode. "Had to depend on the family again, huh!" he remarked, but there was a depth of feeling in his voice that belied the jibe.

Dode was too bewildered to respond. "How did—where did you drop from?" he asked hoarsely.

He discovered Brick Teal among the Castle cowboys who were riding herd on the Stines. Brick rode closer, grinning,

"I read your brand right the first day you hit the Lost Hills country, boy," he admitted. "An' I sent a wire to yore dad that you was up here, standin' a good chance of gettin' mixed up in this feud. I got to say that Lew Castleman don't do things by halves. He come bustin' down here by special train the next day with all his outfit, loaded fer bear. They been hangin' aroun' Wagonbow fer a week jest to back you up in case you took on more'n you could handle."

Dode choked up a little. "I figured you was through with me after I made a fool of myself around Yellow Pine," he said haltingly, to his father.

Lew Castleman tried to snort wrathfully, but finished by blowing his nose. "You're a Castleman, ain't yuh?" he asked gruffly. "I reckon you'll always be gittin' into scrapes an' trouble, an' me an' the boys will be always havin' to come along an' pull you out!"

He turned fiercely on the Stines. "You weasel-minded, two-bit range rats," he roared. "We're turnin' you loose now. Take yore dead an' wounded coyotes along. I've heard about you Stines an' yore damned feud. Twenty of you, jumpin' four men an' a girl. That's why you was so damned anxious to fight. Odds four-to-one is to your likin'. But from now on, if you want to fight a feud, we'll make it a little more even. The Castlemans will back up the Whites after this, an' we'll see who stays in Montana. If you hombres stay, you'll each have a nice little range of your own—measurin' six by three. Is that plain enough?"

The Stines said nothing. They pulled out without a word.

Stella White moved away, and Dode discovered her weeping under the trees, revealed by the glow of the burning house.

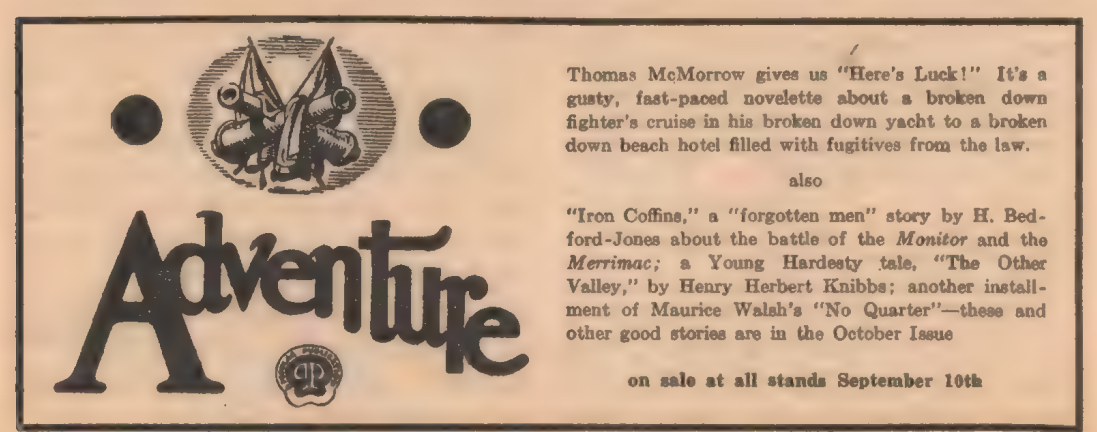
He drew her close. "The feud is over," he told her. "The Stines know what it means to lose a fight now, and they're not the kind to forget."

"Yes," she said shakily. "It's over. It's finished."

"There's a ranch house down on the Pelican River, where half a dozen wild devils named Castleman live," Dode said, making her look up at him. "There hasn't been a woman in that house for more than twenty years, because there wasn't one that seemed to fit in. But I've found the one, an' I'm takin' her there. The Castlemans need tamin', an' I can't do it alone. Will you—?"

Stella White looked up at him, and there was the knowledge of future peace and contentment in her eyes as she drew his face down to her lips. . . .

THE END



Thomas McMorrow gives us "Here's Luck!" It's a gusty, fast-paced novelette about a broken down fighter's cruise in his broken down yacht to a broken down beach hotel filled with fugitives from the law.

also

"Iron Coffins," a "forgotten men" story by H. Bedford-Jones about the battle of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac;* a Young Hardesty tale, "The Other Valley," by Henry Herbert Knibbs; another installment of Maurice Walsh's "No Quarter"—these and other good stories are in the October Issue

on sale at all stands September 10th

By Gunnison Steele

(Author of "Mortgaged—In Powdersmoke," etc.)

With his good left hand, Dal braced his grip on the gun. He forced the barrel up.

HOMESTEAD ON BOOTHILL

In the closing jaws of a merciless, man-made, desert death trap, Tara McQuade took up Dal Reardon's lost-cause fight. . . . Dal could do no less than square the debt to the girl of the Sweetwater Basin—though the only means of payment was with his worthless, outlawed life!

DEATH had Dal Reardon hemmed in. He knew that, knew that the blinding yellow dust clouds that boiled up out of the desert were all that had saved him so far.

Dal's gaunt body was slumped across his running bronc's neck; blood gushed from a bullet hole high up in his back. He wasn't wholly unconscious. He could see the gun in his hand, the ground sliding under his eyes. His brain was clouded, jumbled with wild, half-formed thoughts. He knew that any minute the wind-riven dust clouds might lift and reveal him to Jack Slagle's gunslick riders. And that would mean sudden, merciless death.

Dal braced his hands on his bronc's neck and tried to lift himself upright. The effort sent nauseating waves of pain surging through him, and he remembered that he had tied himself to the saddle.

He knew then that all the chance he had lay in the judgment of the rawboned dun he rode. The dun picked its way cautiously among the low, brown hills and ravines, as if it knew that a sudden noise would attract a screaming hail of lead.

After a while it got so Dal didn't feel the pain. His body and his brain felt numb. In his mind was only the awareness of imminent death.

It hadn't been more than an hour since bushwhack lead had spewed suddenly at Dal Reardon from a brush-lined cutbank as he rode along a shallow arroyo. But it seemed ten times that long. It seemed to Dal as though he had been running and dodging for days among these sand-choked hills and canyons.

He had barely escaped death half a dozen times. And Slagle's Diamond Bar gunhawks were still after him, prowling the hills like hungry wolves, eager for the blood-bounty that Jack Slagle had placed on his head.

A thud of hoofbeats sounded suddenly behind him. With despair in his heart, Dal tried to twist around, to lift the gun in his hand. But that deadening paralysis still held him. Bitter-eyed, he braced himself for the slashing tear of lead.

That last desperate effort had sent dark mists of pain swirling through Dal's brain. The ground was jerking crazily under his eyes. Then he knew that his bronc had stopped. He knew that the hoofbeats had come up with him. He heard a creak of saddle leather, a thud of bootheels on the ground. Then he felt a pair of hands trying to lift him from the saddle.

"Go on and shoot, you damned bushwhackin' skunk!" Dal heard himself mumble harshly. "Finish your dirty work! What the hell are yuh waitin' on?"

"I'm not going to shoot you," he heard a voice say. "I'm going to help you. Can you stand a little fast riding, cowboy?"

That voice made Dal Reardon feel funny as hell. It was soft and clear, unhurried, calm—a girl's voice.

"Let 'er buck ma'am!" Dal gritted.

Then the dun was moving again, fast, and Dal knew that the girl was leading the animal behind her own. The jolting speared his body with savage pain. The swirling mists of pain deepened in his brain, blotted out everything. . . .

WHEN Dal Reardon regained consciousness he was lying on a clean white bed in a strange room. He looked out of the window and saw clear sunshine sparkling on blue hills. His head was clear, his shoulder sore and stiff.

Then he remembered the bushwhack trap on the edge of the hills. He remembered the pain and thirst, the hunger and despair. And the girl! Obviously she had got him away from Jack Slagle's gunwolves, brought him here, dressed his wounds. Dal Reardon grimaced bitterly as he thought of that. It seemed queer as hell for anybody to help him.

As he lay there, Dal Reardon let his mind go back three years. Dal had owned a small but growing outfit up in the northern end of the Sweetwater Basin then. Jack Slagle had owned Sweetwater Basin and still owned it. And because he ruled the sheriff, Slagle had been dreaming of empire even three years ago. He had seen the lush grass, the sweet water, the fat cattle that Dal Reardon owned—and had set out to get them.

He had crushed Dal Reardon, ruined him, taken from him everything he owned. And because he owned the sheriff, Slagle had made Dal Reardon an outlaw. But Reardon hadn't stopped fighting. Living like a hunted wolf in the hills, he had struck back at Slagle with every

opportunity. And always he had waited for a chance to catch Jack Slagle alone and kill him.

But Slagle was wary. He had doubled the bounty money on Dal Reardon's head, had sent his gunslick riders into the hills with orders to hunt down the one man in the world whom he feared. But, vicious and savage as a wolf in his thrusts at Slagle, Dal Reardon had been just as cunning in eluding Slagle's death-traps. . . .

Dal turned his head as he heard a door open. A girl stood in the doorway, looking at Dal Reardon, smiling a little. The girl was slim, dark-haired, brown-eyed.

She came across the room, stood looking down at Dal Reardon.

"The sleep did you good," she said. "You'll be all right in a little while."

All at once Dal Reardon felt ill at ease.

"I'm obliged for what you done for me, ma'am," he said awkwardly. "Mebby, some day, I can pay yuh back. Now I reckon I'll be on my way."

He started to get out of bed, then lay back with a gasp as pain ripped through him. The girl smiled quizzically at him.

"Not for a while, cowboy," she said. "But don't worry—I'll take care of you."

"You—got me away from the gents that was chasin' me, and brought me here—all alone?" Dal asked.

She nodded, and the curves of her tanned face held quiet gravity, as though dark thoughts bothered her mind. "I was out there looking for some of my cattle that had disappeared, when I heard the shooting. Then, a while later, you passed close by me in the sand. I saw that you were badly hurt, and knew that Slagle's gunmen were after you. I brought you here. I dug that bullet out of you with a butcher knife, and bandaged your shoulder. You've been asleep since yesterday."

When the girl paused, Dal saw fear, dread, loneliness battling in her eyes. Then she was smiling again.

"I'm Tara McQuade," she said simply. "And you're Dal Reardon, aren't you?"

Dal nodded, asked slowly, "You knew who you were helping?"

"That's the main reason I helped you," said Tara McQuade quietly. "Because I, too, know how it feels to have a pack of hungry wolves snapping at my heels. Hungry, cowboy?"

Dal Reardon grinned. He didn't feel ill at ease any more.

"Hungry," he said.

Tara McQuade brought hot food from the next room. She stood looking out the window while he ate. Dal studied her as he wolfed the food—her slim, softly-curved young body, the dark glory of her hair. He had seen weariness behind the staunch courage in her dark eyes.

"You live here all alone?" he asked suddenly.

She nodded, without turning. "I did live here with my father and brother. But, six months ago, father was killed, shot in the back from ambush. Then, two months later, they murdered my brother the same way. I've been here alone since. Most of my cattle have been stolen, my fences cut, my haystacks burned. I've tried to fight back, but I don't know how."

Dal Reardon stopped eating. He was conscious of a rising tide of anger.

"You don't have any idea who's doin' these things?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said the girl, "I know who's doing it. The same man who ruined you, Dal Reardon—Jack Slagle. He wants the Tumbling C, because it has irrigation and everything else that goes with plenty of good water. When my father and brother refused to be robbed, he had them murdered. Now he's trying to force me out."

"What do you aim to do?"

She shrugged her slim shoulders.

"I have a chance to sell to a big cattleman up on the Thundergust Range. He offered a fair price for what I have left. But this has been my home, the home of

my people, for a long time. If I stay, I may get a bullet in my back, like my father and brother got. But I don't like to run. . . ."

UNDER Tara McQuade's gentle care, Dal's wounds mended fast. In four days he was able to sit up in bed; in a week he could hobble about the room.

By the end of that week, a miraculous change had come over them both. Dal Reardon, to his astonishment, discovered that he wasn't in any hurry to get well. And that bitter, hopeless look had left Tara's tanned face.

Tara McQuade didn't try to hide the light that came into her eyes when she looked at Dal Reardon. Dal watched the haunting shadows leave her eyes, heard her sing as she went about her work. And realization that he loved Tara McQuade, that she loved him, hit Dal Reardon like a blow.

The realization didn't make him feel any better. It made him realize, more forcibly than ever, that he was an outlaw, that he had to ignore the soft light in Tara McQuade's dark eyes, fight back the things he wanted to say to her. It made fresh, killing hate for Jack Slagle surge like a mighty force through him. . . .

Dal lay on the bed one day and watched two men ride slowly across the plain toward the ranchhouse. As they drew closer, he reached for his gunbelt hanging on a chair, his lips drawn grimly down.

For the burly, black-garbed gent out in front was Jack Slagle. Dal could see his tawny cat-eyes, his hooked, predatory nose, the cruel, pouting set of his lips. The other rider was Cotton Orde, a tow-headed, buck-toothed little gunman.

"You wait here," Dal heard Slagle tell Cotton Orde.

Dal Reardon sat very still, gun in hand, looking at the closed door that opened into the kitchen. He heard Jack Slagle stride along a narrow hallway into the kitchen.

He heard Slagle's smirking, amused voice. "Hello, baby," he said, in a way that gave Dal Reardon an icy feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Tara's reply came, cool and level-voiced: "I'm not your baby! And if that's all you came to say, you can get out."

Jack Slagle laughed softly. "Still on your high horse, eh? Still think I had somethin' to do with them accidents your father and brother had, do yuh?"

"Folks don't get shot in the back by accident," Tara McQuade said bitterly. "Will you leave?"

"When I get damned good and ready!" Slagle snapped. Then his tone changed, became soft, coaxing. "Why can't you be reasonable, Tara? When I want a woman, I get her—and you're the first woman I ever saw I was willin' to marry. Don't that prove I'm on the level? Don't it mean anything to you?"

"It means that there's a man in the world low and snaky enough to want to marry the daughter and sister of the men he murdered in cold blood," Tara McQuade said contemptuously.

Still Dal Reardon sat there, gun in hand, face haggard with the turmoil inside him. He knew that, in just a minute now, he'd open that door and start pumping lead into Jack Slagle. He could see Cotton Orde, sitting out there on his horse, a grin on his buck-toothed face. He could hear what Jack Slagle was saying in the next room.

"So that's the way you feel?" he heard Slagle ask harshly. "Okay, if that suits you, it suits me. Mebby I was a sap for offerin' to marry you. I'll just take you, like I'd take any—"

"You'll take some hot lead!" Tara McQuade's voice was suddenly hard and icy. "Get out before I kill you!"

Dal Reardon had started toward the door, but now he stopped. He could picture what was happening in the next room. He knew that Tara McQuade had

a gun in her hand, that it was pointing at Jack Slagle. A thrill of pride shook him.

He heard Slagle laugh. It was a cruel, feline sound. Then Jack Slagle stalked from the house, leaped into saddle, and there was a wild clatter of hoofs as the two rode quickly away.

Tara McQuade opened the door. She saw Dal Reardon standing there, gun in hand, murder in his eyes, and came quickly to him.

"I was afraid you'd try to kill him," she breathed. "That would have been the wrong thing to do. You must wait."

THE next morning a wiry, bald little gent came to the Tumbling C, and stayed most of the morning. Dal didn't ask who he was, and Tara didn't tell him, but Dal guessed he must be the big Thundergust rancher who wanted to buy her outfit.

That evening, with Tara's help, Dal saddled the dun, and they went for a short ride. He found that he was stronger even than he'd suspected.

Later they sat on the porch and watched the sun go down in a blaze of color. They watched as inky shadows chased the crimson from the sky, as a silvery moon soared upward. But Dal Reardon didn't say the things that were in his mind. He knew that he could never say them.

Next day he went for a longer ride, alone. The jolting didn't pain him much now. He knew that in a couple more days he would tell Tara McQuade goodbye and ride away.

Dal frowned worriedly as he rode along. He thought about his love for Tara McQuade, and how he hated Jack Slagle. He thought about what a hell of a cowardly thing it would be for him to ride off and leave Tara McQuade to fight Jack Slagle alone.

Next morning his lean face was haggard and lined from sleeplessness. Soon after sun-up he saddled the dun, mounted and rode toward the house. Tara McQuade had been watching from a doorway. She didn't say anything as Dal stopped before her. She looked at Dal Reardon, her face gone white and still, her eyes wide, questioning pools.

Dal shifted uneasily under her steady gaze. "I'll ride on now," he said. "Mebby, sometime, I can pay yuh for all the trouble I've been."

"You know I don't want pay," Tara McQuade told him softly. "You know that, don't you, Dal?"

Dal nodded. He didn't know what to say. If he started trying to explain, he'd say too much. He looked at Tara, saw the tragedy written on her tanned face, the nameless emotions in her eyes.

"Where will you go?" she asked.

Dal smiled bitterly, shrugged. "Where is there a place for men of my kind?"

Tara's eyes were steady as she answered, "Wherever there's a place for me!"

Dal knew Tara McQuade was telling him that she'd go with him if he wanted her. He smiled softly, shook his head. He reined the dun up close, leaned from the saddle, took Tara's slim young body in his arms and kissed her on the lips. Then he rode abruptly away, without looking back. He didn't see her as she ran quickly into the house, only to reappear a while later and go toward the corral.

Dal rode west, toward the hills. But, just over the first rise, he turned northward. His face was set in tight lines as he rode along. Dal Reardon had thought it all out the night before. He meant to kill Jack Slagle. That was the only way Tara McQuade would ever have any happiness.

He knew that he'd maybe be killed in the shuffle. But that would be all right, just so Slagle died. It was the least a gent could do for a girl like Tara McQuade.

It made Dal feel proud and humble at the same time when he thought about Tara McQuade loving him. It made him think that maybe, some day, he would no longer be an outlaw. Then he'd ride back to the Tumbling C. But Tara wouldn't be there, unless something happened to Jack Slagle. . . .

THE cowtown of Gunlock consisted of two rows of sun-warped buildings lining a narrow, rutted street. But it had a reputation for toughness. Dal's eyes were alert as he rode unhurriedly along the street, which was deserted except for a few broncs standing at hitchracks. He hoped nobody would see and recognize him before he got to Jack Slagle.

He thought he knew where Slagle would be, at the biggest and flashiest of his gambling houses, a place he called The Raven. Then, when he saw Slagle's big, gaudily rigged roan standing in front of The Raven, he knew he was right.

Dal Reardon's movements still were unhurried and deliberate as he dismounted, draped his reins loosely over the rail. His eyes grim and purposeful, he stepped across the board walk, punched the batwing doors open and strode into The Raven.

His gaze stabbed about the room. Half a dozen men were in the place. Two or three stood at the bar. Jack Slagle sat at a card table, playing stud poker with a rancher. Cotton Orde stood just behind Slagle.

Jack Slagle looked up as Dal entered, his tawny eyes flaring a little with surprise. But he didn't move. A hissing sound came from between Cotton Orde's buckteeth.

Stiff-legged, Dal Reardon stalked forward five steps, stopped.

The room went deathly quiet. Dal knew there was no need for words. Slagle and Cotton Orde knew why he was here. They were waiting, coiled and ready to strike.

Dal Reardon's voice rasped harshly. "Slagle, you damned polecat, get on your feet!"

Slowly, like a big cat stretching, Slagle got up from the table. His hand snaked toward his holstered gun as he moved.

Then, suddenly, the room exploded in a red rage of gunfire. Dal's draw was lightning-fast, his first shot deliberate. The bullet caught Slagle squarely between the eyes, smashed him with pile-driving force back against the table. For a moment that big form seemed to balance there; then its weight sent the table crashing over, and Slagle's lifeless body sprawled to the floor.

Then Cotton Orde's lead ripped through Dal's right shoulder, spun him around. Another bullet burned a furrow across his wrist. With his good left hand, Dal braced his grip on the gun. He forced the barrel up with calm deadliness. His body shivered as more lead from the buck-toothed killer's blazing gun found its mark. Then his own Colt kicked and thundered in his hand. And the tow-headed gunman wilted to the floor.

The spectators had dived for the nearest refuge. But this was Slagle's place, his town. This paralysis, brought on by the swift deadliness of events, wouldn't last long. Dal Reardon knew it would give him just about two minutes to get onto his bronc and out of town.

Fighting the pain and weakness that surged over him, Dal started backing. He made it through the swing doors, stumbled across the board walk to the dun. He got his foot in the stirrup. But he was too weak and sick to pull himself into the saddle. His body felt numb. He could feel blood pulsing from several wounds.

He heard a wild clatter of hoofs along the street. Despair flooded through him. He looked up, saw a horse and rider thundering down upon him, tried to raise the gun in his hand. Then Dal Reardon forgot about the gun . . . . For the rider

was slim, softly tanned, with a mass of raven-black hair cascading over her shoulders!

Tara McQuade reached Dal's side. She leaped to the ground, threw her strong young arms about his blood-soaked body and pushed him into the saddle. Dal looked down at her. He tried to grin, but fainted instead, and slumped forward.

Tara looked wildly, despairingly, along the street. Then she leaped onto the dun behind Dal Reardon. Steadying his body in the saddle with one hand, leading her own horse with the other, she spurred furiously along the street. A gunshot boomed out behind them. A rifle snarled flame and lead from a window. Men poured into the street, guns in hand.

But Tara McQuade and Dal Reardon were already out of gun range. Tara hit a straight line toward the hills to the west. But after she had gone a couple of miles, she stopped. Her clothes were soaked with blood from Dal's wounds. Dal's face was gray, ghastly.

Tara had no time to ascertain how badly he was hurt. With strips torn from her dress, she quickly tied him into the saddle. Then she got onto her own bronc and, leading the dun behind, rode on swiftly toward the rough hills.

THE gunslick posse found it easy enough to follow the trail for the first half dozen miles, for Dal Reardon had been bleeding badly. They followed it into the foothills, and there they lost it. The rest of the day and all night the gunslicks prowled the hills. Then, weary and ill-humored, they went back to town.

They said that Dal Reardon was so badly wounded that he'd die, anyway. And there never had been any reward offered for the girl. They buried Jack Slagle and Cotton Orde. Then they got drunk. And they told each other that Dal Reardon was just as dead as if he'd been hanged. They forgot about him completely.

About a month later an old mustang hunter from the hills, in town for supplies, told how a slim, dark-haired girl had staggered out of the brush to his camp and asked for something to eat. The girl was almost starved, her clothes ragged and smeared with dry blood. Her hands were covered with blisters, as if she had been digging in the hard ground.

The wild horse hunter had given her a pack of food. Then he'd tried to follow her back into the hills, but she'd given him the slip. The mustanger's story didn't cause much excitement in Gunlock. It was just more proof, folks said, that Dal Reardon had died out there in the hills. The blisters on Tara McQuade's hands testified she had dug a grave for him.

By now Gunlock had learned that Tara McQuade had sold the Tumbling C, the day before the gunfight, getting cash in payment. For a while they wondered what had become of Tara—and the $10,000 that she'd got for the ranch. Then, after a few months, they forgot about Tara McQuade and Dal Reardon.

Maybe, if they could have seen what was happening at a little ranch up in Oregon one evening, they would have started wondering again. A man and a woman stood on the ranchhouse porch and watched the sun go down behind the snow-crested mountains that furnished cold, sweet water for the rich rangeland.

The man was lean and bronzed, and he held one shoulder awkwardly as if it was stiff from an old wound. The girl was slim, dark-eyed, tanned. They both looked contented, as though they knew they had a lot to be thankful for.

Folks in the valley called the man Bill Cole, his wife Ann—and thought they were a hell of a swell couple to have for neighbors. But, when the two of them were alone, they called each other Dal and Tara. . . .

BLIND MAN'S

By Stone Cody

(Author of "Cattle Kings Need Taming," etc.)

Only the shell of the man he once had been was Lane Corson, cowman. Yet he was bound by his sacred oath—and a debt he could never hope to pay—to protect with his tragically silent guns the richest range in the war-ravaged Smoky Buttes country. . . .

FOR just that moment, as Lane Corson stood in the shaded doorway of the Mercantile Store and saw Vince Perry across the street, Lane wished that he'd left Jeanie back at the ranch, instead of bringing her with him into Smoky Buttes.

It wasn't so much the sight of Jeanie standing there at Vince Perry's side that brought the anger buzzing up in him, as it was the sight of Vince Perry and his white-chested sorrel, with its elaborate, silver-inlaid rig. Lane's eyes grew flat and he was suddenly conscious of the worn, cedar-handled gun holstered on his thigh. He'd seen that horse, not later than last night, along with horses ridden by other men, near the boundary of the

LAST GUN-BLUFF

Over behind an upturned table, flame stabbed at him from the front. . . .

Dynamic novelette of one cowman against the range

Flying S range. Before them a small herd of cattle had been raising the dust toward Yellow Creek Canyon. . . . Lane Corson's knuckles were white on the pistol butt as he remembered the gunfire and chase in the darkness.

Characteristically as Lane stepped across the sun-baked dust of the street, he got control of himself, realizing that part of his anger was against Jeanie. She knew what he'd always felt against Perry, yet she was smiling up provocatively, wholly preoccupied with him. Lane wondered if she had come to resent his authority and was taking this way of showing him that she did. She'd always been a wild, wilful, high-headed kid. . . .

He didn't look at Vince Perry as he scuffed up. They'd stopped talking and were staring at him, Jeanie with that little

half smile on her softly curving mouth.

He said: "Dave's waiting with the buckboard, Jeanie. Better go along."

Jeanie's chin came up and her dark eyes flashed. "It's too early to drive out, Lane," she protested. "I want to wait until the sun's lower."

His eyes caught hers and held them. "Best get an early start," he said evenly. "Dave's waiting."

For a moment, it looked as though her temper would slip its leash, but she lifted her slender shoulders impatiently and turned to go, slowly stepping down the board walk.

"I'll have a word with you, Vince," Lane said.

There had been a reckless mockery in Vince Perry's eyes. Now, as he answered, the run of amusement in his voice had a rising note, as though temper burst up under it. "It can wait," he said. "I want to walk down with Jeanie."

"No," Lane said flatly. "We'll talk now." His eyes ripped into Perry's.

The latter's high-colored face, with its hint of brashness about the nostrils, suddenly deepened in tint. He waited, his lips flattening.

"Where were you last night, Vince?" Lane rapped out.

The brash, bright-blue anger which had been in Perry's eyes wavered, receded. His face lost color, but his mouth was sullen. "Since when have I been reportin' to you, Corson?" he demanded.

Lane's gray-green eyes narrowed. "That white-chested sorrel of your'n shows up plain, even in the dark," he said levelly. "Another time I'd not ride him, was I you."

Vince Perry's face had closed up. "I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"I reckon you do." Lane's voice was dry and hard. "You're a damn fool, Vince. I never thought you was worth killin', but I figgered you had more horse sense than to tie up with Lash Taintor and Martin Head. Even you ought to be able to see the end of that."

Fear struggled with venom in Vince Perry's eyes. "You got nothin' on me, Corson," he snarled. "The best thing you can do is to keep your damn mouth shut. I don't need you to run my business."

"I'm makin' it my business," Lane told him, hard-eyed, "as you an' Taintor an' Head will soon find out. Meanwhile, keep away from Jeanie. This is my second warning about that. There won't be a third one."

Lane turned on his heel and walked down the street toward the hotel. But before he reached the weatherbeaten, wooden awning of the place, Lash Taintor stepped out of the Broken Peso Saloon.

"Howdy, Lane," he drawled, standing directly in Lane's path.

Lane came to a halt without returning the greeting, letting his glance go over the Diamond Bar owner's compact dark figure, knowing that this encounter had not been accidental. Suddenly he was acutely aware of the Diamond Bar riders lounging across the street in front of the post office. He felt the tension under the emphasized carelessness of their postures, and their eyes had a somber interest in him which he could feel almost as definitely as he did the hot sun on his back.

Lash Taintor smiled briefly, showing the discolored irregularity of his teeth under the droop of his mustache, but the smile did not extend to his black expressionless eyes.

"Sometimes it's a mistake to talk too much," he said, after a moment.

Lane considered him. "I was never a particularly careful man," he said evenly. His nerves had begun to hum, and there was a faint buzzing restlessness in his gun-hand.

A FLICKER of some emotion—it might have been admiration—showed for a moment behind Taintor's opaque

eyes. "No," he said softly. "No. You never were. But what is all this to you, Lane? You own no land on this range, and no cattle. There is no need for you to go blindly against a thing which is stronger than you are."

"Stronger?" Lane's short laugh held contempt. "That's still to be proved."

"You'll be alone in this, you know."

"And if I am?" There was a sudden, rash challenge in Corson's voice. "But I won't be. Do you think I'll be called a liar when I tell what happened last night? I'm goin' to flush you out in the open, Taintor, and then hunt you down, like I would any other cattle-raidin' snake."

Then the anger which Lane had been fighting broke loose inside him. This was the man who was trying to break an orphaned girl and steal her heritage. And suddenly there was a fierce hunger in him to smash hot lead into that dark face and watch Lash Taintor die before his eyes. To hell with his gunies across the street!

"Mebbe you want a showdown right now, Taintor," he rapped out. "If so, you're heeled. . . ."

Lash Taintor shook his head almost pityingly. "You and I might have gotten along well together," he said slowly. "I'd hoped to find you not so stubborn. You put too much value on an old loyalty—a foolish loyalty to a dead man!"

Lane was struggling against the rip of his temper. "Ben Simms was my friend. He trusted me—with his spread, and with his daughter, Jeanie. I aim to take care of both. Maybe you can't understand that, Lash. I expect you've never trusted anybody. I feel damn certain that nobody ever trusted you!"

Lash Taintor's face went a dull red. He made a gesture with his left hand. "I gave you your chance," he said. "You'll regret not takin' it."

He crossed the street, passing his men without a word, and went into the bank.

Lane went on toward the hotel. Dave Birch, the Flying S segundo, with Jeanie, drove by in the buckboard. Dave waved casually. "See you tonight," he called, but Lane saw the worry in his eyes.

Jeanie did not wave. She was looking over her shoulder at someone standing on the porch of the hotel, and her small, tip-nosed face looked hostile. Lane followed her glance and saw Marlene Johnson leaning against one of the pillars of the porch, her hair making a pale, shimmering fire in the shadow. As aways, the sight of her set up a turbulence in his blood.

He went on, with his eyes tightened around the corners, drinking in the sight of Marlene as a man does green grass and water after a desert trip. Physically, there was a fullness of slender curve, a moisture of parted lips about her that tugged at the nerves and put hunger in a man. Only, there were her eyes, cool, calculating and blue, which set a barrier like a deadline fence.

"Hello, Lane." Her voice caressed him. "What's this I've been hearing about you and rustlers?"

The thought was in him like a barb that he would have asked her to marry him months ago, had it not been for the necessity of throwing his personal savings to save Jeanie Simms' Flying S. It wasn't that he had owed Ben Simms any money, but it had never occurred to Lane that he could avoid it. It hurt him now.

"Nothin' much," he said noncommittally. "And then again a good deal. Your dad inside?"

She nodded, putting out her hand impulsively to touch his arm. "You won't do anything foolish, will you, Lane? There are times when it's best to avoid trouble."

He shrugged. "Trouble can't be avoided, only met." He stood looking down, wanting instinctively not to worry her. "I

reckon I'd better go in," he said stiffly. "They'll be waitin' for me. I'll see you afterwards."

Yet afterwards he did not see her.

THEY had been waiting for him—the five ranchers who represented the power of the countryside, as far as honest cattlemen went. Jared Mather, Eph Johnson, Virge Sellers, Joe McBain and Chris Anderson.

Weeks ago, they had listened to him silently when he told how he and Dave Birch had come to suspect that the rustled cattle were being driven through Yellow Creek Canyon, at the back of the Flying S range. He and Dave had set a watch, and last night had proved them right—only there had been more of the rustlers than they had counted on, and the two had been lucky to get out with their skins.

Jared Mather broke the silence when Lane finished. "You say that you recognized Lash Taintor's voice and that the horse that was killed had Martin Head's brand on it. But you could have been mistaken in a voice, and somebody might have throwed a kak over the horse without Head's knowin'."

Lane's voice sharpened. "This ain't a court of law. Hell, it's been plain for a long time that the men behind this rustlin' were Taintor and Head. This just sets a cap on it. A man might be mistaken in a voice, but Dave and I aren't likely to have been fooled in a case like this."

Eph Johnson, Marlene's father, raised his chin off his chest and asked drily, "Well, Lane, what do you suggest?"

Lane's eyes blazed. "Go after 'em!" he clipped. "Run 'em out of the country. There's no other way."

Virge Sellers broke the heavy silence, his faded patient gaze fixed on the wall. "It means war," he said. "It means the range runnin' in blood until Yeller Crick'll scarcely be fit to drink out'n. Hell will bust apart for us all, and God only knows what end to it. I've seen it in my time."

Jared Mather nodded soberly. "It ain't anythin' to go into, if there's a way to keep out of it."

Lane stared, unbelieving. "You don't mean that you want to let these coyotes steal us blind?" But even as he spoke, he knew what was in their minds, what was holding them back.

Their own cattle losses had as yet not been great; and they were well able to stand such losses as they had had. It was the Flying S which had been bearing the brunt of the rustling, and it was only the Flying S which was in a bad way. Ben Simms had made too great an effort to leave a fine ranch for Jeanie. He had spread himself thin—too thin—and the cattle stealing was putting the final touches on a situation which had not been too good to start with.

"No need to be in a rush," Eph Johnson said. "Sometimes these things cure themselves. It's a case of balancin' a few cow-critters against the lives of a lot of good men. An' against the sufferin' of our women-folks."

"Why, damn you," Lane raged suddenly. "You play it safe, don't you? Because you haven't been hit yet where it hurts! Is it your idea to wait, while they pick you off one by one—then get your dander up, when it's too late? By God, I wouldn't have believed—" He broke off, glaring, half sick with the knowledge that he was talking uselessly. "All right, then," he told them in a strangely taut voice. "I'll run a one-man war against them. I'd a damn sight rather die fighting for that ranch than live on, siding a pack of gutless cowards!"

Afterwards, avoiding Marlene, who was in the hotel dining room with her father, he walked aimlessly down the street, chewing the cud of his anger and bitterness.

He remembered the time he had come to the Smoky Buttes country—a ragged

kid of sixteen, not much more than a range bum and only half a cowhand. Ben Simms had treated him like a son, had taught him most of what he knew, and when Lane had gotten his growth, had made him foreman. And when he died, he had made him Jeanie's guardian.

Fine job for a man of twenty-eight, he had thought, repping for a daddy to a leggy, mischievous, passionately independent little maverick like Jeanie! But secretly he had been proud of it, and he had taken over Ben Simms' dream of making Jeanie's heritage one of the finest small cowspreads West of the Pecos. It wasn't such a wild dream at that. The grazing and the water were there. Given a little time, a little luck. . . .

Then, he'd promised himself, he could get about the job of making a place for himself—and Marlene. It was high time. Only, by God, if he failed at this job. . . . Fail? No—not yet. There were other ways, other things to be tried.

Grim-mouthed, he turned and walked back up the street again toward the hotel. Marlene was not in sight. He guessed that she and her father must be staying in town overnight and that she had gone to her room in the hotel. It was already dark.

He stood in front of the hotel, taking in the awakened movement of the town, the shuttle of figures through the shafts of yellow light that came out from the doorways of stores and saloons. The tension he had felt in the afternoon had disappeared, and he knew, bitterly, the reason. Word had gotten around that the ranchmen intended to take no action. There was a release, a lift in men's movements and voices, an almost holiday atmosphere.

Neither Taintor nor Head was in sight, but several Diamond Bar punchers swaggered by as Lane stood there, among them Rafe Steel, Taintor's foreman. There was a new insolence in their manner and in their cold eyes as they greeted Lane.

He saw Steel separate from the others and go into the Broken Peso. He remembered that he had had nothing to eat and went up the street to the Chink's. When he had eaten, he went back toward the hotel, intending to go up to Marlene's room and call for her.

A Mexican kid, bare-footed and ragged, materialized out of the shadow between two buildings. He held a slip of paper out to Lane, and said, "Señor Corson?"

Lane took the note and his pulses began to pound. It was in Marlene's handwriting and it said, simply, "Meet me at the old bridge over the Creek right away. It's important."

He tossed the kid a quarter and turned between the buildings, cutting across the Mexican quarter of town because it was the shortest way to the bridge. He kept his eyes alert, but that was a habit of caution, merely.

At the edge of town, the houses straggled off into scattered adobes. He crossed a vacant, trash-cluttered lot then angled toward the clump of cottonwoods which marked the bridge. No one, apparently, was there, and he assumed that Marlene would wait until the boy told her the note had been delivered before she came.

Then a voice said behind him, "Corson!" There was an intonation in it which sent him whirling, stabbing for his gun.

Not twenty feet away, flame lashed the night, and something slammed hard into his chest, with a queer ripping, shocking feel to it. He kept trying to pull his gun out, but somehow it would not come. He knew it was necessary to hurry because there were two of them out there—one of them narrow and whip-like, the other tall. Shadows wavered and seemed to close in on him as the ground rushed up to meet him. He could hit them if only he could get the gun out. But he felt numb, as

though a mainspring inside him had been smashed.

Orange fire licked out at him again, this time from the tall shadow, and something plucked at his shirt. He got the gun out and started pushing it up, but the flame kept stabbing at him and something kept punching into his body, with that odd effect of a blow which sank in and became a tearing thrust.

"Damn you! Won't you die?" the voice which had first called to him snarled.

Then something seemed to take the side of his head off. A brilliant white light exploded in his brain and blackness rushed in, utter and complete. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Some Things Worth Dying For

LATER, out of some hell's pit of darkness and scarlet searing pain, voices came to him. One of them seemed to belong to old Doc Finlay, who was mostly drunk and with his tongue hung in the middle, but who wasn't a bad medico, so long as he could walk.

"How the hell do I know?" Doc Finlay's liquor-thick tones were demanding irritably. "If he dies he'll die. Won't be the first one that ever did it!"

Cruel fingers were tearing into Lane's body, but he scarcely noticed them because one side of his head was a raw hammering agony that made everything else seem inconsequential. Doc Finlay's voice was rambling on in his ear, endlessly, so that Lane thought, under the savage pain in his head, "Gossipin' like an old woman, as usual. If he gits to lookin' inside me I won't have a secret left in the world!"

The thought yammered at him, grimacing, until it seemed to him that he could see Doc Finlay there at the side of his head, where it was wide open, leering in. Then some screaming clawing agony went down into his chest and the merciful blackness drowned him again.

The next time he awoke, the pain was gone. The bottom had somehow dropped out of him. He could feel his body but he had no desire to move it. It seemed unsubstantial, weightless, and almost not a part of him. His eyelids came open with difficulty and the world around him was a curious, twilight gray, with all the color washed out of it.

Indifferently, he wondered what time of day it was—dawn maybe, though this steady gray light was not quite like any dawn he had ever known. And though he lay for what seemed to him a long time with his eyes open, the light did not change.

It was a long time after, before he heard a little gasp and then a quick step beside him.

Jeanie's voice said, "Lane! Oh, Lane!" with a little husky, singing break in it. Then her face was bending over him.

In the twilight, he saw her features. He thought: "Jeanie's growing up. Before I know it, she'll be a regular little woman." It came to him, also, with a little sense of wonder that she would be eighteen soon.

"Hullo, Funnyface," he whispered.

There was a blur around her eyes, which might have been shadow but looked like tears. "You—you're well!" she said. "Oh, Lane—you're going to be well! You've been sick so long. We—I—"

Long? How long? Wasn't there something he had had to do? The memory of it washed back on him in a swift tide. What had been happening to the ranch? By God, he'd better get up and see if they'd lost any more cattle. . . . He stirred, tried to lift himself up.

Frightened, her hands shot out to hold him down. "You mustn't try to move."

"Soon be sun-up," he tried to grin. "Time to get busy."

"You funny old thing," her voice was

amused, tender. "I guess it seems like sun-up to you, even though it is midday. You lie quiet now while I get you your broth. Why—why what's the matter, darling? And you—is anything wrong?"

He stared at her, with the sudden chilling jolt of the fear running through him, then past her at the gray light that outlined the window.

"Lane—what is it?" The anxiety in her voice was edging toward panic.

He knew he must control himself, not frighten her—only his weakness could not overcome the stark terror which must be looking out of his eyes.

"It's nothin'—nothin'," he whispered. "Just—just weak, I guess."

Her voice came out on a breath of relief. "I'll get your broth—and Doc Finlay."

"How's the weather?" he whispered cagily when she came back with the broth. "Gonna get some rain, aren't we?"

"Lord knows it's time," she answered cheerfully. "There hasn't been more'n one silly little cloud in the sky for weeks now." Then she looked at him queerly. "Why'd you ask that? Is it too hot for you? Does the light hurt your eyes?"

"No," he murmured through dry lips. "No. I—I like it. The—the light. . . ."

She held his head up while he drank the broth, her expression queerly anxious and tender. He could see her features so clearly that some of the fear ran out of him.

"I think I'll just pull the shade down a little," she said and walked to the window.

Terror flooded through him again, worse now. For as she walked away from him, her form diminished, turned into a shadow, like those wavering shadows he had seen that last night in the darkness, with the yellow flame licking out from them. And her face was no more than a dark, unrecognizable blur.

He was almost blind!

FOR days, as his strength began to come back to him, he fought that grim, certain knowledge. He tried to face it, tried to deny it, tried to tell himself that it was no more than temporary. It would get better, if only he rested his eyes. So he would lie for sweating hours with them closed, then scarcely dare open them because if they were no better the disappointment of it would not be bearable. But when he did open them, they were no better.

What was hardest to bear was the uncertainty. What he wanted more than anything else was to ask Doc Finlay about it. But some powerful instinct warned him to conceal his weakness. Doc Finlay was a kindly man and a good doctor, but he was also a drunk, and liquor set his tongue to wagging. Nothing was a secret to Doc Finlay when red-eye was working in him.

Nor could he talk about it to Jeanie. He was not the man to put the burden of his trouble on a woman's shoulders, and that woman a mere kid. But she was more like a mother to him, these days. And the emotional tug of that was so great that more than once he had had to fight desperately against the impulse to put his head on her breast and tell her. But he did not.

Nor did he tell Marlene, who came in from time to time to see him, bringing with her that disturbing aura which was especially hers. Marlene's manner had changed in some indefinable way. It was almost as though she resented him somehow, now that he was weak and almost helpless. But of course that was impossible. Women weren't that way. He guessed that she was just the same, and that he was imagining things.

The day came when he was strong enough to leave the hotel, and that day he had a flash of almost unbearable hope. He could see better on the street! There was no color, and anything more than

twenty yards from him was a shapeless shadow, but he could see better! He was getting well!

Yet, the very sweetness of that hope made the days which followed blacker, more unbearable. For it did not take long to discover that he had been able to see better only because he was out-of-doors, where the light was stronger.

The day came when he could climb into the saddle. He approached with fierce eagerness and with his heart pounding in trepidation. This would be the test as to whether he was still any good at cow-work, as to whether he was still a man or only the shell of one.

He got through the ordeal of roping out and saddling his horse creditably enough, for he could recognize the lines of the rangy claybank which was his top mount and his hand still had its skill with a rope.

Neither Jeanie nor Dave, who were watching him, seemed to notice anything.

Yet that ride was one of sweating despair. He had wanted to find out something about the condition of the spread, make some sort of tally, but his eyes were useless for that. He could see cattle when he was on top of them, but covering every square yard of the range was an impossibility. He came back with a suspicion that things weren't right, but he had no real knowledge.

When he rode in, he called Dave aside. He had decided on a bluff. "You've been lyin' to me, Dave," he said quietly. "Come clean. How many cattle are we missin'?"

Dave shot a quick, relieved glance at him and Lane knew that the bluff had worked. If Dave had suspected there was anything wrong with his eyes, he was already half-convinced that he had been mistaken.

"Couple of hundred head," the old cowhand told him. "Jeanie wouldn't let me tell you."

Then it all came out. The rustling had gone on for a couple of weeks after Lane had been shot. Dave and Slim Magruder had watched the canyon and had had one brush with the thieves, but, as before, they had been helpless to stop them. Then they'd both received a warning to leave the spread. Slim, discouraged, had quit.

Jeanie had made Dave stay away from the canyon, by threatening to go with him if he went. And for a time the rustlers had had things all their own way. Then, abruptly, the rustling had stopped. There had been no more losses. But the ranch was already in hopeless shape.

Lane chewed that over and decided that he knew what it meant. Lash Taintor meant to take over the spread himself, and saw no need of stripping it further of cows. Josh Bitterman, down at the bank, would never renew the mortgage now.

LANE spent a couple of morose days thinking about it, before any possible plan occurred to him. Then one morning he announced he was going into town.

Jeanie's reaction to that was a revelation. She fought it, in a kind of panic.

"You—you're in no shape to go," she cried. "Those men who tried to kill you before. . . ."

He had a thin, mirthless smile for that. "Do you figure I'm goin' to hole up here the rest of my life?"

There was no answer, but, woman-like, Jeanie made one. When she found him obdurate, she burst into tears. Lane stared at her. Jeanie never cried. He put his arms awkwardly around her.

For a moment, she leaned against him, sobbing her heart out. "B-but w-why?" she cried. "T-there's no reason. . . . Oh, Lane! Lane!" She was clinging to him desperately, pressed against him. His mind stampeded. He couldn't tell her what he meant to do. He had to find some other reason. "I'm not goin' to get into trouble, honey," he got out at length. "I

—you see I haven't seen Marlene since."

She fought free of him furiously. "You're going to risk your life for that—that— Oh! but a man can be a fool!" And with that she stormed out of the room.

But when he was ready to ride, she was waiting for him at the corral, with Dave, calmly insistent on going with him. The three of them rode in silently, with Dave looking worried.

Smoky Buttes wore its Saturday afternoon aspect. Along the hitchracks, horses dozed hip-shot or switched restlessly at the flies. There was movement along the street, in and out of stores and saloons, men grouped on corners or hunkered in the shade before buildings.

Lane's nerves tensed. He was moving through a world of gray shadows, without form or individuality. He had known it was going to be bad, but somehow this was worse than he had believed.

The first voice which sent its hail out to him struck at the pit of his stomach in a jolt of nervous panic. It sounded like Joe McBain, but he could not be sure.

He turned his head in the direction and lifted a casual hand. "Howdy, Joe," he said evenly, without cordiality. At his side, Jeanie let out her breath in an audible sigh. He met her eyes, catching the shadow of some expression on her face which might have been relief or uncertainty. But new confidence rose within him because he knew he had hit it right about Joe McBain.

They dismounted in front of the hotel and separated. Jeanie went to Bixby's Store, Dave made for the Broken Peso and Lane went to the bank.

Josh Bitterman, the banker, sat behind his desk and looked at Lane regretfully. He was bald-headed, weathered, with kindly wrinkles about his eyes, and a jaw which had the set of a bear-trap.

"Sorry, son," he said. "It ain't a question of the interest. The way things are I wouldn't be doin' right if I renewed the mortgage on the Flyin' S."

"With any luck," Lane said doggedly, "we can pull through this year. If we do, we'll be set. Ben Simms dealt with you a long time, was your friend. It's his daughter's ranch now, an'—"

"Good bankin' an' friendship are two different things," Josh Bitterman replied. "You talk of luck—what luck can you expect? Have you had any luck so far, bucking—the things you've got to buck."

Lane's eyes narrowed at Bitterman's hesitating voice. "What things, Josh?"

The banker looked uncomfortable. "I reckon we don't need to go into that."

"You on the other side, Josh?"

Bitterman's face flushed, but his mouth was grim. "I'm on the side of this bank," he said dryly. "It's my business to decide when a risk is good or bad, and bet the bank's money accordin'. In my judgment, the odds are against you."

Lane leaned forward. "Let's have it on the table," he said. "If the parties that are—hostile—to the Flyin' S was to quit bein' hostile, you'd figger we was a good enough risk. Is that it?"

The banker shrugged. "That would depend," he said slowly. And then, as though it were being pulled out of him: "Likely that would make a difference."

Lane Corson got up. "It's a hell of a deal," he said evenly, "when a cowman's bank finds itself backin' a lot of damn cow-thieves."

Josh Bitterman made an impatient gesture. "When there's a bad drought an' a bank has to call its paper, you might say it was backin' the weather, too," he said. "I regret this, Lane, just like you do." A sudden flicker of concern showed on the banker's hard features. "Remember, son, that there are worse things than losin' just a cow-spread. Sometimes you can get a ranch back, but. . . ." He let his voice trail off.

Lane turned at the door, a tight-lipped, mirthless smile on his gaunt features.

"There's some things worth dyin' for, Bitterman," he said flatly. And then the door slammed behind him.

CHAPTER THREE

Blind Gun-Guardian

DAVE BIRCH was leaning against the outside of the bank. "Rafe Steel an' Vince Perry are in town," he said warningly.

Lane shot him a look of surprise. "Why do you tell me that?" he demanded.

Dave looked uncomfortable, as though he didn't enjoy being caught interfering in another man's business, even to the extent of telling things a friend had to tell. "Seems like you did some talkin' while you was out of your head with fever," he said, "an' then Doc Finlay, he did some while he was out of his'n with snake-juice. Rafe an' Vince might have took it bad."

Lane stood silent a long time, his face still and nervousness growing under his breastbone. He hadn't counted on this. It made things bad—damn bad. After a while, he asked, "Where are they?"

"They was in the Broken Peso," Dave said, with a curious dryness in his tone. "Now they're outside, standin' in front of it."

Lane ran his eyes down the street to where he knew the Broken Peso stood, but he couldn't see anything. Not even the front of the building. And it came to him that his eyes were getting worse. What he had to do must be done quickly —before it was too late.

After a little, Lane could see the front of the saloon, but he couldn't tell whether anybody was standing there or not. The back of his throat felt dry and the palms of his hands began to sweat.

The memory of how it felt to have lead smashing into his body seared his mind, and that recollection of pain and helplessness was so vivid that his flesh shrank.

It wouldn't have been so bad if he hadn't been sure that Vince Perry was yellow. There was a chance that Perry might get into a panic and start shooting before he could see him. Would that throw Rafe into action, out of sheer nervous reflex? If so, that would end it all.

But now there was no more chance to think, for he could see a number of men in front of the saloon—shadows, wavering and fuzzy-edged. And he could hear Dave Birch's breath, harsh at his shoulder. He should have made a better stab at making Dave stay back.

"Where's Lash Taintor?" Lane asked, out of the corner of his mouth.

"In the Broken Peso—stayin' out of this, I reckon," Dave breathed.

"You stay out of it, too," Lane said.

The shadows in front of him parted. Some of them moved aside, leaving two standing together.

Under veiled lids, Lane strained to catch sight of their gun-hands. Already he could sense the tension, the strung-up readiness in their postures. Would they wait? Or would they start shooting, not giving him a chance?

Then he was close. Their figures, their hands and features and guns suddenly took visible form. The nervous frenzy under his breastbone subsided. They had waited for him! He felt like laughing, yet that cold, biting anger was tearing at him again. If they had only known how blind he was!

He remembered Rafe Steel's voice, calling him to turn that night. He remembered the high, shadowy outline of Vince Perry by his side.

Shouldn't he finish it? Shouldn't he kill now, forgetting everything else? No, the plan mustn't be spoiled.

"Howdy, boys," he said quietly. "Howdy, Rafe. How's it, Vince?"

He went past them through the saloon door.

THE expelled gasp of the people gathered to each side was audible on the afternoon air. The faces of that waiting pair there, as they mechanically responded to his greeting, were comical in their bewilderment.

He went on into the saloon, sensing Dave Birch's amazement at his elbow.

He did not look for Lash Taintor. There must be no mistake—no hesitancy or fumbling which might betray him.

"Make a chance to tell Lash I want to see him in the back room," he murmured to Dave, and walked straight back there. Voices spoke to him, but he only lifted his hand in careless greeting. Nobody was in the back room, which was occasionally used for private poker sessions. He sat down at the table facing the door.

In a few minutes, the door opened and Lash Taintor stood there. Behind him were Martin Head and Rafe Steel.

Lane said, "Come in, gents."

Head's lantern-jawed face looked frankly uncertain and suspicious, but Lash Taintor was suave and unconcerned. When the door was closed, Rafe Steel casually began to walk toward a position which would put him on Lane's flank.

Lane grinned again. "Keep in front of me, Rafe. I've had you behind me once, and I didn't like it."

Rafe stiffened visibly and his gun-hand jerked. Lash Taintor laughed. "There's somethin' about him, ain't there?" he tossed at Martin Head. "I always said so."

He sat down opposite Lane, his eyes admiring. "What's this about?"

Lane leaned forward. His belly was tied into a tight knot, but nothing of his feeling showed in his face.

"I don't want you to get the idea that I've had some sense shot into me," he said quietly. "I don't learn things that way. The shootin' wasn't necessary. All that was needed was that meetin' I had with a lot of gents that call themselves cowmen but ain't. You called the turn on that, before the meetin'. Remember? It didn't take me long to figure things out after that. You said somethin' that day about our workin' together. Mebbe you still feel the same about it."

Lash Taintor's eyes were slitted and piercing. For the first time Lane felt the full force of the man.

"Things have changed some since then," he said quietly.

"You mean that you think now we can't hold onto the Flying S," Lash said indifferently. "And that you'll have your runway free, anyhow. But you're wrong about the ranch."

Taintor's face tightened. "That'll need some provin'," he said curtly.

"No," Lane told him gently. "But I'll go this far with you, Lash. If you an' I can't agree, Josh Bitterman won't call the mortgage, like you think he will. He won't, because it'll be paid—taken up by somebody else."

"If that's so," Lash Taintor ripped back, narrow-eyed. "Why're you willin' to deal with me?"

"Two reasons," Lane told him swiftly. "The obligation happens to be in a place where I don't want to accept it. That's one reason. The other is, that I'd still be fighting a lone hand against you. I can hire some gun-hands to stuff up that rat hole of yours, but it'd cost us both plenty, and in the end I might lose. I figger it's better horse sense to go along with you. That way, I'll make more, and risk less."

Lash Taintor eyed him consideringly, then exchanged a glance with Martin Head.

"The Flyin' S," Lane said deliberately, "is a nice little spread. But beside what you've got in mind, it's nothin'. It would be better for you if Jeanie held on to it. That way, it'd take a long time for the rest of the range to suspect that there was anythin' funny goin' on. An' if anybody got to nosin' around, I could warn 'em

off my land. You could back me in that, an' that way, we'd have the law on our side."

"I'll take care of the law," Taintor said drily.

"No," Lane objected. "I'm not talkin' about the local law. This thing's liable to get widespread, if you aim at what I think you aim at. The more you can put the other side in the wrong, the better off you'll be."

Lash Taintor smiled suddenly, coldly. "You may be bluffin' an' you may not," he said. "But I've figgered from the first you could make a useful man. Only, don't get any ideas, Lane. Start to double-cross me, an' you won't last five minutes. Not only that, but I'll make that gal of Simms sorry she was ever born."

The knot in Lane's stomach came undone suddenly. "I keep my word when I give it," he said quietly.

Lash Taintor nodded, a hint of mockery in his eyes. "If I didn't know that about you, there'd be no deal."

"The deal is this," Lane said steadily. "Jeanie Simms keeps her spread. You don't get it, an' nobody else does."

Lash Taintor looked at him wonderingly. "And you—what do you get?"

Lane shrugged. "When the mortgage is off that spread and things are runnin' right, maybe you an' me will want to make another deal."

Later, he walked out of that room and that saloon with his head thrown back and a new hardness about his mouth. Dave was waiting for him. Together they collected Jeanie and rode home.

As the sun got low, the light ran swiftly out of Lane's world. In the dark he was blinder than a bat by candle-light. And as the world of his eyes grew dark, the world of his mind filled with a gray, despairing clarity like the cold light of an overcast dawn. He had done what he could, and now he knew that would not be enough.

LASH TAINTOR had agreed too readily. That meant that he had a use for Lane, and that when he had served that use, Lane would be tossed to the wolves. He had had to agree to ride with the gang, and in a little while he would be as guilty as they—helpless to betray them. But Lash Taintor would not be helpless to betray him. Moreover, he would have to ride with them at night. How long then, could he keep them from guessing the truth about his blindness?

One thing only he could hope for. The mortgage would be due for renewal in a month. That would give Jeanie breathing time. Beyond that . . . what he'd done had been hardly worth the doing—a mere device to make the inevitable still more bitter when it came.

Yet, by what seemed to him a miracle, Lane Corson managed to pass that first test of riding with the rustlers. Partly, it was because he knew the range like the palm of his hand. Partly, it was owing to night spent alone in the saddle, in preparation, teaching all his senses but sight to tell him where he was. But mostly, his success lay in the swift, sensitive intelligence of the horse he rode.

The claybank was the finest cow-horse Lane had ever sat, and somehow, it seemed to his rider, he sensed the disability of the man he carried. He did the work almost automatically of rounding up the cattle, of keeping them in line once the drive started. Riding with his ears strained, with only the click of an occasional shod hoof to tell him where his companions were, and only the sounds of the herd to give him his direction, Lane would feel the claybank bunch under him, launch himself in the darkness at some steer that had broken ranks, and his heart would swell with gratitude toward this four-footed partner.

Once the stuff had been shoved through Yellow Creek Canyon into the wild, turreted confusion of the badlands beyond,

Lane was "allowed" to ride back to the Flying S. It was thought best that he should be seen about the place during the daytime, to keep suspicion from pointing at him. But he knew it served the renegades' purpose, to prevent him from knowing where the cattle were driven from there. Lash Taintor was taking no chances.

The bunch had begun on Jared Mather now. As Lane had suspected, it was Taintor's plan to pick them off one by one, hoping that the others would delay action until their own turns came. In that way he would be able to buy them up (with, in effect, their own cattle) until he controlled the entire Smoky Buttes range.

But Lane saw now that Taintor and Head had no particular fear of war. Between them they had about thirty fighting hands—experienced gunmen, worth twice as many ordinary cowboys in the kind of ruthless warfare they intended to wage. And the county law, he guessed, had been paid not to see too much. . . .

After that first night he was less tense, less fearful of betraying himself. But there was a dragging sense of heaviness in him as he rode, and a sickness about the job he was doing. For just in the measure that the rustling succeeded, so Jeanie's position became more precarious. In helping to add to their power, he was only making more certain the day of reckoning for himself and her.

Meanwhile, his days were not made easier by Dave Birch's attitude. Dave had stiffened up. The tone he used to Lane was habitually dry; the glances he gave him were grim, somehow ominous. And Jeanie was curiously silent, a little distant, her eyes questioning. How much, he wondered, did they know or suspect?

Neither offered to ride with him the next time he saddled up and went to town. No doubt, he thought bitterly, they considered that he was no longer in need of protection.

Later, when he met Jared Mather, he was glad they had not come.

MATHER'S steady eyes were glinting fire. "Mebbe you was right about that Bar Diamond crowd, Lane," he said, hard-faced. "The stuff I'm losin' don't seem to go anywhere in particular. My guess is it gets drifted onto your range, and then is gathered and shoved through the canyon. I figger to set a watch up there an' show 'em that it costs something to rustle Rafter M stuff."

"You'll stay off of Flyin' S range, Mather," Lane told him curtly. "The Rafter M's troubles have got nothin' to do with us."

Jared Mather stared at him incredulously. Then his face crimsoned.

"You mean to tell me—Why damn your orn'ry hide," he blazed, "what are you doin'—tyin' up with cow thieves?"

"Watch your tongue, Mather!" Lane's eyes were suddenly dangerous. "I ain't in the habit of takin' that kind of talk. You, an' the rest of the coyotin' so-called stockmen on this range, threw me to the wolves when I needed you. To hell with you! Catch all the rustlers you've a mind to, but stay off of Flyin' S range! That's fair warnin'."

That incident nearly completed the hell which encircled Lane's life. Through the darkness in which he walked was now thrust the gathering hostility of the men he had called friends. The inference to be drawn from his attitude was too obvious. He had tied up with the other crowd. He had turned wolf—traitor to his own kind.

Then Marlene Johnson came back. She had been away, visiting school friends in Denver. Lane rode over to the E-J Connected to see her.

Gaunt, hollow-eyed, the scar of the gunshot wound still raw at the side of his head, he was conscious that he was not a particularly prepossessing sight. He was conscious also that no warm welcome was

likely to await him at the Johnson spread, except for Marlene. But he rode there without hesitation. There was no feeling of guilt in him—only a bewildered recognition that his fate had finally run into impossible lines.

By luck, Marlene was on the front porch when he rode up. She came down to meet him as he swung out of the saddle. Out of the grayness in which he lived, her figure took shape. No one else, as far as his vision carried, was in sight.

He said, "Marlene," softly, aware as he spoke that there was somehow a curious stiffness about the shadowy, graceful figure.

"I wonder that you come here." Her voice was hard.

Riding there, he had been thinking of the warm sound of her voice, and the things he'd tell her. Now suddenly he wondered what those things had been. It was as though he had dreamed of an intimacy which had never existed, and of a girl whom he had only seen and talked with in another, far-off world. . . .

"I—I know what you—what you mean," he said, after a long moment. "I don't know how to tell you about it, Marlene." He spoke hesitantly, half-aware that he was searching inside himself for a truth which would not easily come.

"Is there anything to be told?" she asked coldly. And then her voice lifted on a swift, bright wave of anger. "It's plain enough that you've been making a fool of yourself. If you were in love with somebody else, Lane, why didn't you have the honesty to say so? You could have been a thief and an outlaw then, without trying to make a fool of me!"

The habitual dimness of his eyes blazed protest. "You've got no right to talk like that," he clipped. "I've not tried to make a fool of you. I've—"

"Oh, no?" She cut him off angrily. "You've been running after that little Simms girl all along. You made a fool of yourself for her, fighting things you hadn't the strength to fight. And now you've turned rustler for her. Oh, the whole range knows it—without proof! And what do you think you've made of me?"

HE WAS rigid, fighting the anger and bewilderment her words set up in him. "Listen, Marlene," he said after a moment, "I want to talk to you about somethin'. Vince Perry. . . ."

Her lips curved scornfully. "So that's on your mind. Well, let me tell you that it's none of your business, Lane Corson. And never was! What there is between me and Vince is nobody's business but ours. I should think you'd have learned that by now. If you hadn't come snooping around after us that night you wouldn't have gotten shot by those gunmen of Taintor's. What if I did want to talk to Vince about something? Who gave you the right to interfere?"

Lane's lips were suddenly stiff. The words came out of his mouth awkwardly. "You—you sent *him* that note. . . ." The uncertainty, the question in his stunned mind did not register in that stumbling speech. Vince must have already had his secret tryst with Marlene, and then sent the boy with the note to him!

"So that was it?" she flared at him. "You got hold of my note? Why, you—you spy!"

"That—that wasn't the first time you had met him—like that." The statement came out of him slowly.

"Well? And if it wasn't?" Marlene's voice rose to hysterical defiance. "He's worth two of you, you—you clod! Did you think that I—"

Some force, some final, scornful acceptance in his gesture, silenced her.

In the saddle, he said, as though he were saying something almost irrelevant, "That'll be all, I reckon."

Yet as he rode off, rather than pain

and despair, there was in him only a faint sense of surprise. He had gone to Marlene to say good-bye, because he knew himself now, as he played his desperate, tragically gallant game to the end, to be less than half a man, unworthy of any woman.

He hadn't for one moment forgotten about that note. Another, less stable man would have wondered whether or not Marlene Johnson had attempted to betray him to his death. But there was a force, a steadfastness in Lane which had kept that notion altogether out of his mind. He knew the business about the note would have some other, some innocent explanation. And now he had discovered what that innocent explanation was. Marlene Johnson had been carrying on a dubious affair with Vince Perry, all the while that Lane had considered that she was his girl.

The knowledge was not a wound but a yell of derision within his mind. He had been a fool—doubly a fool, because now he knew with a sudden overwhelming certainty that all along Jeanie had been in his heart—and only Jeanie. He had been a fool—a triple fool in his heart. But not, thank God, in his actions.

He had stuck by Jeanie, out of what he thought was a sense of duty. Now he knew that it had been out of the very hunger of his being.

He laughed aloud, with an odd, despairing exultation, so that the claybank lifted his ears and automatically quickened his pace. Lane spurred him toward the Flying S and Jeanie.

Somehow, somewhere, sometime, he would get rid of this darkness which smothered his life. There must be a doc somewhere that could do something about it. He would go on fighting for Jeanie and the Flying S, but now it no longer mattered so much whether he won or not. He'd get well, and when that time came, he'd take care of Jeanie all right, ranch or no ranch. Jeanie was his—his, by the Lord!

When the ranch buildings made dim clumps of shadow in the grayness, he launched the claybank toward them.

"Where's Jeanie?" he demanded of Dave Birch, lounging near the corral.

"What?" The oldster's voice held honest surprise. "She's gone off on a trip. Didn't she tell you? Went over to Tolman, to see somebody. Said she'd be gone a few days."

Lane's mouth tightened. "Oh," he said tautly. "When did she decide that? Why's she goin' there?"

Dave Birch's face closed up. "You'll have to figger that for yourself," he said. "I wonder she didn't tell you anythin'."

That night and the next day he spent in a state of unwonted restlessness. The night before Jeanie had left, there had been a drive of cattle—a big enough one to make Lane expect some definite reaction from the range. But he could not keep his mind on that.

It was not like Jeanie to go off without telling him anything, without giving him any explanation. She knew the Borgmans in Tolman, but he could think of no reason why she might want to see them at that time. And Dave Birch's attitude puzzled him, also. It was as though he were concealing something, and not quite liking it.

CHAPTER FOUR

Death Rules Smoky Buttes

TORMENTED by an unexplainable restlessness, the fourth day he rode into town. He went to the station and talked to Art Venner, the ticket agent.

"When do you figger Jeanie can get back, if she starts sometime today?" he asked cagily.

Venner looked surprised. "From San Francisco? Why, that'd be—"

"That where she took her ticket to?"

The startled ferocity of the question snapped Venner's eyes wide open. "Why —why, yes," he stammered.

Lane turned away, his mind in turmoil.

It was the next day before he finally decided to corner Dave.

Dave got sore at the questioning. Finally, he blurted, "How the hell do I know? Ain't there anythin' at all you can figger out for yourself. Blind you may be, but by the livin' Judge Priest. . . !"

Then Lane rode back into town, grim-mouthed, uncomprehending, but certain that there was something here that he ought to investigate. An undefined hunch led him to Doc Finlay's office.

The medico was seated behind his desk, on which reposed a half-empty bottle of whiskey.

"Lane, m'boy," Doc Finlay said, "h'arya? Sit down; take li'l drink. It's the medicine that fixes ev'thin'. 'They who walk in darkness'. . . !"

"What do you know about walkin' in darkness?" Lane demanded grimly.

Doc Finlay waved a genial hand. "Now, Lane—now, son," he said expansively, "it's goin' to be all right. Don't you worry. Them eyes of your'n. . . ."

"How long have you known about my eyes?"

"M'boy, I feared it from the beginnin'. When Jeanie come to me the other day, I said, 'Honey, I thought so. I been expectin' you. But what can I do? I ain't a surgeon. I'm a doctor—an' a damn good one,' I shays. 'Folks don't always think sho,' I shays, 'because why? Because I drink a li'l liquor. But I'm a good one. O'ny, I ain't a surgeon. Tha's what that boy needs—a surgeon.' I shays, 'there's pressure there somewhere. Y'un'erstan'—pressure of blood, prob'ly. There's one man he needs to see—o'ny one, mind you —but that'll cost plenty. You got to take him to Frisco, an'—' "

Lane drew a soft, sharp breath, so that Doc Finlay looked up at him slyly.

"Oh, she said you'd never go," he babbled. "Tha's why she went herself. Bring 'im back with her. Tel'graphed, tha's what she did. Thousand dollars, he answered that it'd cost."

"A thousand dollars!" Lane exclaimed hoarsely. "How could she get a thousand dollars? You—you're lyin'—"

"Not me! Doc Finlay wagged a knowing finger at him. "Nev'r lie, m'boy. I tol' her she was foolish. But that's all Lash would offer over an' above the mortgage, so—Shay!" The medico's drink-inflamed eyes widened. "You ain't shupposed t'know that. She tol' me. . . ."

He broke off, suddenly choking because Lane's fingers held a viselike grip on his throat. "You lie!" he cried hoarsely. "She didn't sell out to Lash. She. . . ."

His own voice broke off, his fingers relaxed. For suddenly he knew that what Doc Finlay said was the truth. He stood before the bug-eyed medico with his chest heaving.

"When did she make this deal?" he ripped out. "Did she sign a deed? Has it been registered? Who else knows about it?"

But Doc Finlay's dignity had been injured. With drunken stubbornness, he relapsed into silence. "Nev' betray p'fessional confidence," he announced virtuously. And nothing could shake him.

Lane swore and went out.

TAINTOR was not around town, but for the moment Lane was indifferent to that. He went to the office of Buzzard Whittle, who called himself a lawyer and who handled Taintor and Head's business.

Whittle had gotten his nickname from his physique as well as from his character. He was a lean, tall, stooped individual, with small blinking black eyes and a baldish head set on a limber neck.

Lane, unable to read his eyes at that distance, caught the uneasy note in his

voice as he cleared his throat and said, "Ah, Lane."

Lane leaned over the desk where he could get a good look at the man's face, and said: "I want that deed Jeanie Simms signed to the Flyin' S. Haul it out, Whittle."

A look of alarm flickered in the lawyer's small, blinking eyes, succeeded by a look of craftiness, and then by dead blankness, all in the space of a split second. "Why, I—I haven't heard of any deed. . . ."

Lane Corson's features twisted into a snarl that had in it the sudden deadliness of a pouncing cougar. His left shot out and closed about the law-shark's neck. Iron fingers shut off the man's startled squawk, lifted Whittle bodily out of his chair.

"You'd rather lie then eat, Whittle, but this is one time you're goin' to tell the truth." His voice was low, but the repressed murder in it raged in the back of his throat like a molten torrent. "I don't need a gun for you, you slimy snake. Deal it out straight and deal it quick, or I'm wringin' your neck right now!"

Whittle's eyes no longer looked small. They were popping out of his head like white-rimmed taws. His cadaverous face was blotched purple, and suffocated, squawking sounds burst from his lips.

Lane released his throat, caught his coat lapels below the chin and rocked him back and forth with a soft, deadly violence. "Talk, Whittle," he said. "Talk quick."

The lawyer got his breath in a long whistling gasp. "Taintor's got it," he gabbled. "He kept it until it could be registered. The gal—didn't want you to—know until after the doc she's bringin' came."

Lane's eyes stabbed him. "Stay in your office the rest of the day, an' keep the door locked. If I catch you tryin' to send any messages, I'll gut-shoot you on sight."

He wheeled and went out.

Afterward, he sat the afternoon out on the porch of the hotel. If Taintor was coming into town he'd likely get in by sundown or shortly after.

He sat there with his Stetson pulled low over his eyes, watching the thin shadows which were men materialize out of the haze of the street, clink past, and disappear into the farther grayness.

He thought of Jeanie, and restlessness dragged at his nerves. If he could get Taintor and Head. . . . It was too much to add Rafe Steele to the list before they got him. If only he could see a little better—just a little better!

And then, as though they had jumped out of the ground, they were there—five of them. Even his half-blind eyes couldn't mistake their outline—men and horses—before the hitchrack of the Broken Peso. He watched them get down and go into the saloon.

He sat there a long moment, willing his nerves into quiet coldness, until the sweat dried on his palms and the moisture came back to his palate. Then he got up and walked toward the saloon, feeling the heavy drag of the sixgun on his thigh.

HE STOOD inside the door, smiling a little to veil the sudden despairing foretaste of failure in his mouth. This room was too dark . . . too damn dark. . . .

Then he felt rather than saw them turn from the bar to face him.

"Howdy, boys." His voice was casual, to match the easy friendliness of his grin.

His ear, fine as a crystal glass these days, caught and registered every subtlety of their greeting. Head's stolid voice had something unrelenting about it, and Rafe Steel had, as always, that oiled under-rasp of hostility, of hatred for the man whom he had tried to murder and whom he feared. Vince Perry was over-cordial, with his undertones of guilt and unease. Lash Taintor was friendly. . . .

Lane went up beside Lash and ordered whiskey, exchanged easy trivialities.

When he had tossed off the last of his

drink, he turned to the boss of the Diamond Bar with a friendly grin. "I hear you an' Jeanie been puttin' one over on me," he said. "Looks like there's been a slip-up, though."

Lash Tantor stiffened. His voice sounded noncommital, but faintly puzzled. "Slip-up? What do you mean?"

"I tried to find you yesterday," Lane told him. "I got a letter from her—seems like she found out in 'Frisco that what she done wasn't legal. She thought bein' of age was enough, but until the guardeenship's settled up an' cleared away, it seems my name's got to go along with hers on anythin' she signs." He laughed. "She's a funny little devil. She was afraid you'd find it out an' figger that she had tried to do you." He reached toward the pocket of his shirt. "Here, read what—" He broke off, tried his other pockets in succession, and then said: "Hell, I reckon I left it in that shirt I wore yesterday."

It was flawless acting, but Lash Taintor's narrowed eyes were at once suspicious and wary. "How come she wrote to you about it?" he demanded. "She was hell-set on you not knowin'."

"Scared I'd kick up a row, I reckon," Lane said, laughing a little. "Then when she found out she needed me, she had to come clean."

"Yeah?" Taintor grinned thinly, but none of the grin extended to his eyes. "An' how near right was she about that?"

Lane's smile was tolerant. "Shucks! I was tryin' to hang on because I thought that was what she wanted. But if she wants to pull out, that's her grief."

He slapped a coin on the bar to pay for his drink. "Well, I got some chores to do," he said, turning away. "When you want my John Hancock on the thing, let me know."

Taintor let him get nearly to the door.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Now's as good a time as any." His voice was suddenly hard, almost hostile.

"All right with me," Lane said, smiling indifferently. "You got it with you?"

Taintor got pen and ink from the bartender and led the way to a table. Lane did not catch his glance at the others, but he was vividly conscious that they followed. His heart had begun to hammer. It gave a leap that seemed about to burst his chest when Taintor slapped a legal paper on the table and said, "Here you are. Sign."

Lash bent over it, pretending to read it, seeing Jeanie's signature waver up at him from the bottom of the paper. Then his thumb and forefinger caught the bottom of the paper, ripped the signature off, popped it into his mouth. He swallowed, gagging a little.

"You gave your word to leave Jeanie's spread alone, Lash," he said evenly. "But this time you double-crossed the wrong man."

For a moment, there was stunned silence.

"Why, damn you!" Taintor's voice was choked with unbelieving fury as his hands ripped toward his holstered guns. But Taintor's slugs bit into the table top as Lane's bullet killed him. Then pandemonium broke.

Lane's left hand caught the table, sent it driving at the others. The edge of it caught Rafe Steel across the thighs, caromed off to hit Martin Head.

That one, swift, planned movement saved Lane's life for the moment. Steel's Colt blasted almost in his face but the slug missed him.

Jumping sideward, he slammed a shot at Martin Head and cursed between set teeth because he had missed. Head *had* to be next! The room around him was a roaring hell, peopled by leaping, moving gray shadows. Lead seared across his ribs.

He jumped straight for Martin Head. The surprise of that made Rafe Steel miss again and caught Head off-guard. The two Colts made one hammering explosion,

but Lane saw Head jerk and stiffen and he knew with grim exultation that his own lead had gone home.

He snapped sideways just as Head's knees buckled and he went down. The rustler fell between Lane and Rafe Steel, his body stopping a bullet meant for Lane.

Lane shot at Rafe. As the sixgun bucked against his palm something hit him hard in the body. He dropped to his knees, gasping, but swung, trying to pick out the man who had shot him. Over behind another upturned table, flame stabbed at him from the front. Through the murk he could not even see a shadow there, but he knew that was not the man who had shot him. The bullet had struck him at another angle, in his side.

He swung and shot at a moving shadow, hearing, as he did so, a girl's choked scream at the door. Then came the staccato hammering of a small-caliber gun. Card Lester, Steel's gun-mate, dropped one of his guns and fell to his knees.

Lane did not wait. He charged for the man behind the table, holding his last cartridge back. In front of him, a sixgun clicked empty, and Vince Perry jumped up from the table like a rabbit flushed from a hole. Lane's sudden, savage laugh ripped through the room's hell-haze like the cackle of death itself. He would not use that last shot—he'd beat Vince Perry's head in for him!

There was gun-fire behind him. A bullet smashed into him, whirling him, almost knocking him from his feet. Lane was only vaguely conscious of Vince Perry's arm flashing up, and a Colt barrel smashing downward. Then flame exploded in Lane's head, his knees buckled, and there was only a vast, humming darkness. . . .

HE OPENED his eyes, and Jeanie's face was bending over him; Jeanie's trembling lips were saying, "Lane! Lane! It was my fault. I hit him once—that man Lester. I thought it would stop him, but he shot you again. Lane, darling, don't die. Please don't die. I came to make you well. . . ." She was sobbing.

Lane couldn't quite make it out. Something was giving him hell around the body, then he heard Doc Finlay's voice and knew what the heavy fingered pain was, and why.

"He killed 'em because they was tryin' to do Jeanie out of her spread," Doc Finlay was babbling eagerly. "Never heard of nothin' like it. Four of 'em dead and that there Card Lester in bad shape. An' him all but blind as a bat. . . ."

Then Lane suddenly understood what was confusing him. For he wasn't blind as a bat. Something had happened.

"Jeanie! I can see you!" he cried, with exultation flooding him. "I can see you like I used to."

Jeanie's eyes were wide with wonder. She turned swiftly to a man at her side, whom Lane had not noticed.

"Is he delirious, Doctor?" she asked swiftly.

The man shook his head. "That blow on the head might have done it," he said. "Shows the nerve is not injured—just pressure there. I may have to operate anyhow, but he'll see again."

A sob of pure joy tore out of Jeanie's throat. "You see, darling? You *can't* die now!"

"Hell!" Lane said strongly. "I ain't goin' to die. I'm goin' to keep livin' an' lookin' at you until I dry up and blow away."

"It'll be a long t-time b-before that happens. I'll l-love you too much!" For the second time in her life Jeanie was crying. But at last, with Lane's arms holding her close, her wracking sobs subsided, and she was smiling up into his face touching his eyelids gently with her fingers. And somehow Lane knew that the light of glory which was filling her eyes would always be there for him to see. . . .

THE END

Bullets Are Easier

By John G. Pearsol

(Author of "Manhunt Miracle," etc.)

"You can't do it, Blaze," Jimmy said. "I won't let you do it. . . ."

Young Jimmy Slater cherished the lie his invalid mother lived on—that her two sons were big, strong, and successful. But Jimmy was just a helpless, broken cripple, and Blaze Slater was long gone. . . . Until he came back, on a blown horse, figuring that a little gunsmoke investment on that poverty range would pay big dividends. . . .

JIMMY SLATER was eighteen years old, and for the past six years he'd been sitting here every evening on the edge of the ranch house porch, watching the dying sun paint the sky with its multicolored fingers of light. Jimmy's mother, Martha Slater, sat up in the old, hide-bottomed rocker, her eyes also turned in the direction of the dying sun. But Martha Slater couldn't see the sun, nor the mountains nor the sky.

Jimmy guessed she knew it was evening; he guessed that she could see the red and the gold and the purple streamers

that slanted up from the blue-black peaks, because she sat there with a half smile on her lips.

Pretty soon, Jimmy knew, she'd stop rocking and turn her sightless eyes toward Jimmy. With them it was sort of a silent communion.

"It's evening, Jimmy boy," she'd say, "Will you take me in?"

It always seemed sort of a miracle to Jimmy Slater, when his mother would do that. It was so much like she could see, yet he knew that she lived always in a world of darkness. Too, it was like the times that Big Mart Blankley rode across the flats and stopped there by the porch.

"Good day, Martha," Mart said, sort of soft-like.

And Martha Slater always answered: "Good day, Mart Blankley."

That was sort of a ritual with them, it seemed. Somehow Jimmy Slater knew that his mother guessed this big, fierce-eyed man who rode over so often was not Mart Blankley at all. It was then that she smiled as she smiled when the sun was setting, and Jimmy Slater guessed then that his mother knew Mart Blankley was really the famous outlaw who was once known as Shadow Jordon. It was as if his mother realized that Shadow Jordon was here to watch over her, to see that she had everything she needed, like a guardian angel.

For a guardian angel Mart Blankley had been, to both Jimmy and his mother, since the death of Jimmy's father. If it hadn't been for Mart Blankley Jimmy guessed he wouldn't have his mother with him now. She'd be in some institution somewhere, where they cared for blind folks.

And if it wasn't for Mart Blankley, Jimmy wouldn't be here either, because the ranch wouldn't make its own way. It never had. Even if it could be made to pay, Jimmy Slater wasn't well enough, nor husky enough, to ride and rope and work like hell to keep a ranch going.

Jimmy had never been well since the big fire when his mother had lost her sight, when Jimmy's father had been killed, and Jimmy had been hurt in the back, so that he never grew up to be big and strong like his brother Blaze. Jimmy stayed little and pale and he couldn't ride very far or very fast. His arms weren't strong and he couldn't lift anything at all.

The money that kept the Slaters going was supposed to be coming from an insurance company. A lawyer sent a check to them each month.

At first, Jimmy had believed it, until Mart Blankley dropped an envelope out of his pocket one day when he rode up to chat. Jimmy had picked up the envelope, which was addressed to the Rincon lawyer who sent them their checks.

It wasn't sealed, so he read the letter from Mart Blankley to the lawyer, telling him that he was enclosing another check for six months' payment to Martha Slater, and to keep his mouth shut, and a lot of other things that made Jimmy Slater remember that a man named Jordon had been in love with his mother before Jimmy's father, Bill Slater, had married her.

Jim Jordon had been a good man then. He hadn't been an outlaw. He'd been a good friend of Bill Slater's, and stayed a good friend to him after he had married the girl Jim Jordon had loved. Jimmy remembered his father and his mother talking about Jim Jordon, and about his turning bad and being called Shadow Jordon.

Shadow Jordon had stopped to see the Slaters several times down south, before they came up here, and Jimmy remembered his face. He'd remembered it too, when Shadow Jordon had come up to this country after the fire, after Martha was blind and after Jimmy's father was dead. He'd known then that Mart Blankley was Shadow Jordon. But this Apache country was a long way from the border, where

Shadow Jordon was wanted, and many years had slipped away now, since anyone had heard of Shadow Jordon.

Now Mart Blankley was pretty well established in the Apache country. Folks thought he was a respectable rancher who never had a dark past. But Jimmy Slater knew that Mart Blankley was the finest white man who ever breathed, no matter whether he was Shadow Jordon or not.

Mart Blankley had quit the outlaw trails to see that a little blind lady he had always loved never wanted for anything. He was taking care of her, and her helplessly disabled son, and Jimmy wished there was some way he could let Mart Blankley know how much he thought of him, and how he appreciated what he was doing. But if Mart Blankley wanted it to be a secret, it would always be a secret. Anything that Mart Blankley wanted was okay with Jimmy Slater.

THE red and rose and purple in the sky slowly faded to mix with the gray of dusk. Martha Slater turned her head as though she knew there was nothing beautiful there in the sky to look at now.

"It's evening, Jimmy," she said. "I better go in."

Jimmy rose up from the porch and took his mother's arm. But he didn't raise her from the chair. He looked off across the flats into the purple haze of dusk and saw two riders coming toward the ranch. One of them was big-framed, like Mart Blankley. The other was slender, smaller.

For a second Jimmy Slater thought the big one might be Mart, and he knew his mother would want to sit on the porch and talk to him. Then he knew it wasn't Mart, because Mart always rode alone.

"There's somebody coming, mother," he said, and let her arm down on the chair.

As he watched, a faint feeling of uneasiness stirred him. There was a vague familiarity about that bigger rider. They came closer and dismounted near the porch and Jimmy stood there and stared. The bigger one was his brother, Blaze Slater, a brother Jimmy hadn't seen for years.

Blaze was grinning at Jimmy, but Jimmy didn't grin back at him. He wondered why he didn't, as he wondered how he knew somehow that Blaze was here for no good.

Blaze had been big and strong and could have come up here with his father and mother and helped make things go. He could have been here after his father died, to run the ranch and make it pay. But Blaze had stayed down around the border. He hadn't appeared to care a damn about his mother, his father, or Jimmy, or anything.

Blaze dragged his spurs up to the porch and kept grinning at Jimmy, and as he looked at Blaze, Jimmy was glad, all of a sudden, that his mother was blind, because that grin that Blaze had on his face was not nice at all. There was something evil in it, something cruel and callous behind it somewhere. There was a knife-slash scar a cross Blaze's jaw that accentuated that underlying evil, and Jimmy was glad that his mother couldn't see that either. Blaze had been bad before. But he was worse now. Jimmy knew that.

"Hello Jimmy," Blaze said, and Jimmy's mother seemed to stiffen in her chair.

"Blaze!" she said. "My boy!"

Jimmy felt funny as hell when he saw Blaze kiss his mother and saw the tears of happiness trickle down her faded cheeks.

The slender fellow who had come with Blaze stood beside the porch and Jimmy couldn't read a thing on his blank, hard face.

"And this is Pete Wilson, mother and Jimmy," Blaze said. He's my partner. We're in business together."

"Business?" asked Martha Slater. "The cattle business I suppose, Mister Wilson?"

"The cattle business—and the banking

business too," Pete Wilson stated flatly.

"That's fine," said Jimmy's mother. "It makes me proud to know that my boy is doing well."

"I'm doing fine," Blaze said.

But Blaze didn't look like he was doing anything, except maybe riding pretty hard and pretty fast. His horse was gaunt and sweat-streaked. His clothes were worn and dirty.

"I'm proud of both my boys," Martha Slater said again, turning toward the sound of Wilson's voice. "Blaze and Jimmy, both. Blaze always was big and strong and I knew he'd come out on top some day. And now Jimmy has gotten well too. Doesn't he look fine, Blaze? Isn't it fine that he's grown to be strong, and is able to handle the ranch so well?"

Blaze looked at Jimmy, at his pale face, at his skinny frame and grinned. Pete Wilson grinned too, like it was a good joke. Jimmy Slater, a big, strong man!

"He sure looks swell," said Blaze.

Jimmy sighed with relief. He didn't know what he'd have done if Blaze had disillusioned that old lady who thought that Jimmy was husky and able to work hard. And the irony of it all brought a bitter twist to Jimmy's lips. Their mother, proud of Blaze, when Jimmy knew he wasn't anything to be proud of. And proud of Jimmy, when Jimmy wasn't anything to be proud of either—not able to work, or to ride . . . .

They went into the house and lit the lamps, and Jimmy Slater felt funny again as his mother clung to Blaze's arm. Somehow, he felt that Blaze didn't have a right to that affection.

Blaze hadn't stuck and tried. Blaze never did do anything, but sit and talk, and go off on wild sprees. Then Jimmy told himself he shouldn't feel that way—not about Blaze, anyhow. Blaze was his brother, and a fellow should love and stick up for his brother, whether he was any good or not.

You didn't love your folks because they were good or bad. You loved them because they were yours!

THE evening waned, and Jimmy tried to make his voice sound sincere when he told his mother that he too, was glad Blaze was doing so well. He tried not to let Blaze see that he wasn't acting natural, but it was hard to do. Then the sound of a horse's hoofs came in softly from outside and Jimmy wondered why Blaze rose suddenly to go out in the kitchen for a drink of water.

Jimmy went to the door and let Mart Blankley in. Mart looked a little concerned when he saw the stranger, Pete Wilson, in the house. But Jimmy could understand why Mart would be concerned, because there was a thousand dollars reward still on Shadow Jordon's head. They'd hang Shadow Jordon if they caught him. Mart didn't want to be recognized.

Then Blaze came back in and Jimmy told him he wanted him to meet Mart Blankley. Mart shook hands with Blaze and with Pete Wilson and didn't act like he'd ever seen Blaze before. Jimmy guessed that Blaze knew Mart Blankley was really Shadow Jordon, because all through the evening Blaze sat there and looked at Mart with a half smile on his lips.

Pete Wilson kept looking at Mart too, even more intently than Blaze. Both still kept watching Mart when he rose to go.

"Good-night, Martha," Blankley said, and Jimmy heard that soft note in his voice again.

"Good-night, Mart Blankley," said Martha Slater, smiling that sort of sweet, satisfied smile that made Jimmy feel that his mother was happy in spite of her sightless eyes.

Jimmy watched Mart Blankley leave and listened to his horse leave the yard. They all talked some more, but Jimmy couldn't be himself. He couldn't forget

how Pete Wilson had sat there, so wooden-faced, and looked at Mart Blankley.

Jimmy's mother went to bed, and Wilson and Blaze turned in, too. But Jimmy went outside and sat on the porch edge. He found himself wishing that Blaze hadn't come back. He couldn't tell when Blaze would do some fool thing that would make Martha Slater know her eldest son wasn't worth a damn.

The moon came up and sifted a soft silver spray down on the land. Somewhere out across the flats a coyote wailed, eerie and ghostly in the unreal moonlight.

Jimmy rose and walked around the house. He wished he were as wise as Mart Blankley or as strong as Blaze, so he could do something, so he could tell Blaze that he wouldn't stand for any monkey business. But he couldn't tell Blaze anything because Blaze would slap the hell out of Jimmy if he crossed him. Blaze always used to do that, and Jimmy could never do anything about it.

Jimmy moved on around the house and stopped when he heard a voice come from the open window of the room where Blaze and Wilson were supposed to be asleep.

"I knew him as soon as he came in," Pete Wilson's voice came clearly out to Jimmy. "He's Shadow Jordon. That thousand on him is as good today as it ever was; just as good as the thousand on Scarface Malone. We—"

"Just forget the Scarface Malone talk," came Blaze Slater's voice.

"Okay," said Wilson. "I'll go in to see the sheriff. I'll guarantee to deliver a wanted outlaw to him, with a thousand dollars on his head. I'll have him meet us near Jordon's ranch somewhere. I won't tell him who it is, because Jordon probably has a lot of friends up here. They might tip him off. But when I meet the sheriff and lead him up to this Blankley's place and point him out, he'll have to arrest him. I'll collect the thousand and meet you in the hills. We need some money anyhow. We're pushed hard. I'll . . . ."

JIMMY SLATER tried to hear more, but a coyote yapped closer now to the house. When the shaky yammers died there was no more sound inside the room. The only thing more that Jimmy heard was "tomorrow night."

Wilson and Blaze had to have money. Why did they have to have money? And who was Scarface Malone? Why were Blaze and Wilson "hard-pushed"?

Jimmy couldn't find an answer to any of his questions. He just sat there on the porch, miserable and haunted by worry, wondering desperately and hopelessly what he could do to save Mart Blankley.

Jimmy couldn't let anything happen to Mart Blankley, for Mart kept the smile on his mother's lips. He made it so that she could sit on the porch and know that the sun was setting. He made it so that Jimmy could lie to her and make her think that he was strong and running their ranch, making their own way. Jimmy's mother liked that. She was happy. And she couldn't lose that happiness.

Gray dawn came and Jimmy Slater tried to console himself by thinking that he hadn't heard Blaze answer Wilson. Maybe Blaze had told Wilson to go to hell. He surely would do that, because Blaze knew that Shadow Jordon had been his father's best friend. Blaze wouldn't turn Shadow Jordon into the law. . . .

The sound of voices came from within the house and Jimmy went in and started to get breakfast.

They finished breakfast and Jimmy heard Blaze telling his mother about his business, about having all his money tied up in stock right now. But soon he'd be in the real money; and Jimmy wanted to laugh and ask him about turning Mart Blankley in for a thousand dollars.

Blaze and Wilson went outside and Wilson saddled his horse and rode away.

Blaze came back and told Jimmy that Wilson had some business in town and that he'd be back this evening. Jimmy didn't say anything. He couldn't think of anything to say, and anyhow, he couldn't talk here in front of his mother.

Jimmy told his mother that he wouldn't go out today to work the stock. He'd stay at home and visit with Blaze. Martha Slater looked pleased at that, and Blaze grinned at the idea of a weakling like Jimmy working stock. Blaze probably knew there wasn't any stock because he'd ridden across the range on his way in here, but he had decency enough to keep his mouth shut.

Wilson rode back in the evening. Jimmy saw him talking to Blaze out near the corrals, and knew they had agreed on something because Blaze nodded. They all had supper and Jimmy led his mother out to the porch. She sat there while the sun dropped down toward the dog-nosed peaks. She looked as though she were happier than ever, and Jimmy was glad she couldn't see the misery in his face.

Then Wilson saddled a horse and rode away again.

"More business," Blaze told his mother. "They keep us humpin'."

Martha Slater smiled, and Jimmy didn't dare look at Blaze for fear Blaze would see these things that were in his eyes.

"I might have to leave any time," Blaze went on. "I just had a little spare leisure on my hands, so I dropped in. But I expect I'll have to hurry away right soon."

Martha Slater nodded. "I understand Blaze," she said gently. "I'll be sorry to lose you again, but I'm proud of you. I knew you'd be a big man some day."

Blaze looked at Jimmy, then down at the ground. Jimmy wondered if maybe Blaze was a little ashamed, but he guessed not. A man couldn't have any shame and do the things Blaze was going to do.

"I'm going to have to ride into town now," Blaze said again. "If there's important news for me there, I might not be able to get back out here."

Jimmy watched Blaze kiss his mother, and watched the tears come to her sightless eyes again. But they were tears of happiness and Jimmy kept on wondering what he could do to make it so that she'd always be happy that way, so that Mart would keep on coming back here. . . .

Blaze rode away and Jimmy took his mother in the house. He felt her arms tremble as he led her in. She still cried a little about Blaze leaving.

Jimmy kissed her, then went over and took his father's old pistol off the peg near the door. He hardly knew what he'd do with the gun. But he knew he'd have to do something. He couldn't have his mother lose Mart Blankley. Someway, somehow, something had to be done. . . .

"I guess I'll ride after Blaze and go into town with him," Jimmy told his mother. "Would you be lonesome if I did that?"

His mother shook her head. "I'll be glad, Jimmy," she said.

JIMMY SLATER rode fast through the night, faster than he had ever ridden in his life. The bounce of his horse under him hurt his back, but he kept the bronc going. He had to keep it going. He had to save Mart Blankley. He knew now that there was only one way to save him, a way that made Jimmy grow cold to think of. But it was Blaze and Wilson balanced against that little lady who couldn't see; who sat on the porch and smiled when Mart Blankley came to talk to her.

Jimmy circled the trail he knew Wilson and Blaze would have to take to get near Blankley's ranch. He rode up into the hills and looked down and finally saw them coming. He knew that Wilson had met Blaze; that Wilson would leave Blaze again in a while, to go down to meet a posse and turn Mart Blankley in to the law.

Jimmy got off his horse and tied it be-

side the trail. He shivered while he stood there and waited, but it wasn't from the cold.

The click of steel-shod hoofs came to Jimmy's ears. He took the gun from under his shirt and cocked it. He held it down at his side so it couldn't be seen. He watched Blaze and Wilson come around the bend in the trail. They stopped and looked at him and Blaze cursed.

"What the hell you doing out here?"

Jimmy didn't say anything for a minute. He stood there steeling himself for what he was going to have to say.

"You can't do it, Blaze," Jimmy said. "I won't let you do it!"

Blaze started to laugh, then he caught a glimpse of Jimmy's set, white face under the brim of his pushed-back hat. He looked curiously at Jimmy.

Wilson muttered a curse and started to whip his hand back to his gun, but Jimmy's cocked gun was already in his hand. He swung it up and pressed the trigger. The roar of it echoed back and forth across the hills, while Wilson lost the stiffness that kept him in the saddle. He fell sidewise and lay there in the road.

Jimmy kept the gun pointed straight at Blaze now. He cocked it again.

"I won't let you do it, Blaze," he said. "Mart Blankley means too much to mother. He's kept her and me, sends us checks every month and pretends it's from an insurance company. You know there's no cattle. You know I can't work for her. There's a posse coming to find an outlaw, Blaze. I know it. But you have to stop them. You have to go down there and keep them away from Mart Blankley. If they don't find an outlaw, they might start looking through their reward notice to find out who this outlaw was they were supposed to get. They might find out that Mart Blankley is Shadow Jordon. Take off your guns and start down there Blaze! Tell 'em there was a mistake. Tell 'em you was foolin'—that there is no outlaw. Tell 'em anything!"

Blaze sat there. He didn't move, he didn't take off his guns. Jimmy Slater knew by looking at him that he wasn't going to take them off. He opened his mouth to tell Blaze that he'd shoot if he didn't do as he said. But when he tried to do that he saw a picture of Blaze Slater, lying down in the dust, where Wilson was lying now. He saw a picture of Martha Slater, smiling and telling Jimmy how proud she was that he was strong.

Jimmy Slater let the pressure off the trigger, and uncocked the gun. Suddenly he threw the pistol away from him and heard it clatter among the rocks. He covered his face with his hands to shut out that picture of Blaze, laying there dead in the dust, killed by Jimmy Slater. He couldn't do that. He just wasn't big enough, he guessed. Too weak . . . .

It seemed like a long time before Jimmy felt Blaze's hand on his shoulder. He heard Blaze's voice, and it was different. It was kind of husky, throaty, and carried a quality that had never been in Blaze's voice before.

"Sometimes a fellow wakes up too late," Blaze was saying. "That's me, Jimmy. Just now I see what a skunk I've been, but it's too late to change. Read this Jimmy, then you'll know why I wouldn't want to go down there with my guns off. There's two ways—this way is the easiest."

Then there was a clatter of hoofs, and Blaze was gone, and Jimmy was staring at a piece of paper that Blaze had thrust into his hand. He looked at it and Blaze Slater's face stared back at him from the reward dodger. The face was that of Blaze Slater, but the name under the picture was Scarface Malone. . . .

The mutter of hoofbeats came faintly up to Jimmy Slater as he sat there, dazed, stunned, realizing that Blaze was an outlaw, wanted for murder. The poster said,

"$1,000 Reward—Dead Or Alive."

The hoofbeats were coming closer. . . .

A shot drifted up to where Jimmy Slater sat, then a fusilade of shots, and suddenly Jimmy Slater knew what Blaze had meant by what he said. There were two ways to die—and a bullet was better than a rope. Blaze Slater had given them an outlaw.

He'd kept them away from Mart Blankley. He'd made it so that Mart could come and talk to Martha, to keep her smiling, keep her from knowing that Jimmy was weak and sickly and not able to work. He'd made it so she could still keep on thinking that Blaze was fine and doing well in business. She could be proud of him, because nobody would know that Scarface Malone was Blaze Slater. She could think he'd been called away when he went to town, like Blaze said he might.

There were no more shots from the valley. The silence was deep. Jimmy Slater started back to the ranch, his shoulders slumped, his head bowed. He could picture his mother, sitting on the porch, waiting for the sun to sink. She'd be proud of Jimmy and of Blaze, and she had a right to be proud of Blaze now.

It wouldn't make so much difference that she'd be wrong about Jimmy, because he'd never be strong. But she'd never know, because the checks would come and Mart would come, and she'd smile and be happy.

Jimmy remembered her saying that she knew Blaze would be a big man some day. There were tears in Jimmy's eyes when he thought of what Blaze had had to do to be a really big man. But he smiled softly as he knew it was true. . . .

Blaze really was big.

Send for this Genuine Sterling Silver Western Ring Today!

Join the legion of *Dime Western Magazine* readers who are already wearing this genuine Sterling silver ring! Here is a chance for all lovers of the Old West, who thrill to its high drama, who take pride in its great heritage of fair play, courage and loyalty, to wear this handsome symbol of the untamed cattle empire! The ring pictured is of permanent value and lasting beauty; it is only because of the vast number of readers of this magazine requesting some fitting memento of the old longhorn days that we were able to make purchases in quantity sufficient to pass on to you the real saving it represents. You can buy this ring for the amazingly low price of fifty cents only through the publishers of this magazine.

We take pride in offering this worth-while ornament to everyone who would like to wear and keep this symbol of the untamed frontier. Just send fifty cents in money-order, stamps or coin, fill out the coupon with your name, address and ring size, and your ring will be mailed, post-paid, the same day your order is received!

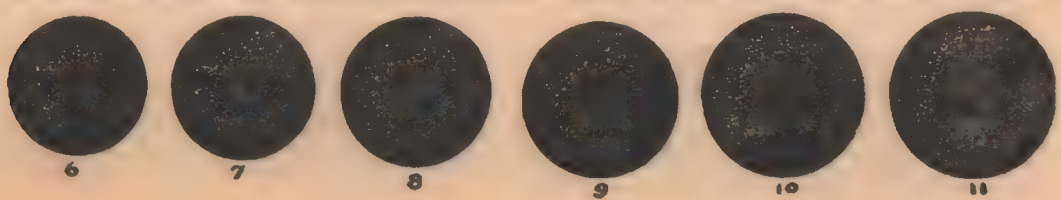
Editor of DIME WESTERN MAGAZINE,
205 East 42nd Street, New York City

I would like to own the sterling silver "Longhorn" ring, illustrated above, for which I enclose fifty cents in coin or stamps.....
(Signature)

.....
(Street and number)

.....
(City and State)

My ring size is.....



GUNSMOKE PAYS FOR TEXAS CATTLE

Randy Jessup offered to guide those two desperately harried cowmen and the girl safe to railhead. But Randy had his own uses for their Texas herd—and his game was more deadly than any night-shadowed gun-trap which might be waiting for them along that lawless border trail.

OUT on the flat-land, where the slow running waters of the Nueces join the Rio Frio northeast of Fort Ewell, two men and a girl stood bare-headed under a hot Texas sun.

Nearby, half a dozen Mexican vaqueros, having devoutly and repeatedly crossed themselves, fell to with alacrity and began throwing dirt into a freshly dug grave.

Stirring frontier novelette of the trail-drivers' deadline

By John A. Saxon

(Author of "Badlands Benediction.")

With an angry cry of "Kill the Tejanos!" the jayhawkers rode forward, their guns spitting. . . .

Lean and wiry like most men of the brasada, almost as dark as the Mexicans themselves, Les Montfort stared dry-eyed at the rapidly filling hole in the sand. Then he turned to Harmony Mason and put a comforting hand on the girl's shoulder.

"I—did the best I could, Harmony," he said slowly; referring to the few, stumbling words of eulogy he had just uttered over the body of John Mason, Harmony's father. "I guess he'd understand. . . ."

The girl stood there tall and slim, and if her chin was quivering, in her eyes was no sign of tears. Her light brown hair was pulled tightly back, fastened with a ribbon. She put on her hat, an old Mexi-

can sombrero, decorated around the base of the crown with tarnished silver braid.

"Dad didn't believe much in church, Les," she answered. "I reckon he'd be satisfied to know you done your best—that's all he ever asked of anybody. He always said it wasn't the words that counted, it was what was back of them. But now—I'm going to need you and Trent more than ever."

"Yore dad took us boys in like a couple of stray *ladinos,* Harmony," Les Montfort returned. "He gave us both what little book-learnin' he could. Why, me and Trent—you know how *we* feel, don't you?"

"John Mason was all man, Harmony," cut in Trent Carter, speaking for the first time in a deep, slightly choked voice. Carter was twenty-two, built like a reed, and with a suppleness that spoke of raw-hide strength. "I reckon back East he'd uh been takin' in stray cats an' foundlin's."

He looked away toward the distant, low-lying hills that seemed little more than undulations upon the surface of the flat-land.

"If he'd of been my own dad," he added with feeling, "he couldn't of done no more for me an' Les. Weren't no call for him to do it, neither, just 'cause the Masons an' the Montforts an' the Carters was all neighbors back in Tennessee."

Les Montfort shook his shaggy black head. "I got a pretty good idea what John Mason's last words would of been, if he'd had any," he said huskily. "He'd of said: 'You boys look after Harmony'."

Eye to eye the two young men faced each other.

"We'd of done that anyhow, Les," said Trent Carter slowly, and the other nodded assent.

THE half dozen Mexicans, understanding little of the conversation, had filled in the grave and stood by, watching the group. They had lived many years on the Mason ranch and now, like children, they were a bit bewildered by the sudden death of the *patrón.*

A hundred yards away a herd of two thousand longhorns, held in a long cut-bank by riders at either end, stomped restlessly. Lean-flanked, half-wild creatures of the brasadas they were jumpy, nervous. And two million more like them roamed the hills of southeast Texas, unattended, almost worthless.

Cattle were a drug on the market. Hides were no longer valuable. A set up herd was worth less than three dollars a head.

"Dad wouldn't have considered the trek except that—well, there was nothing else left," said Harmony Mason sadly. "His only chance was to get a herd through to Sedalia. The railroad's there and he had heard they were paying twenty-five dollars a head. . . ."

"A hundred to one chance, Harmony!" Les Montfort replied with a dubious shake of his head. "We'd of follered Pop Mason to the end of the world, if he'd said so, but the Ozarks are full of jayhawkers an' Border Ruffians. Two hundred thousand head of Texas cattle started through last year. Less than a quarter of 'em got to market. The rest was never heard of again—nor the men who drove 'em. The Baxter Springs country's full of cut-throats, murderers, an' thieves. Men who have lived with a gun in their hand for four years ain't goin' to go back to honest work till they have to—not as long as they can steal. Foragin' they call it. Texas Fever gives 'em an' excuse for stoppin' cattle they say ain't 'American'. There ain't a chance—"

"Dad knew all that," she cut in, "but he wanted to risk it."

For a long moment Les Montfort stared at the fresh mound of dirt that covered all that was mortal of John Mason, done to death by so simple a thing as a fall over the edge of a six foot cut-

bank from the back of a stumbling horse —a six foot drop that broke his neck.

For the first time the girl's blue eyes moistened. "I can't ask you to go through with it," she said, with a little tremble in her voice. "It was a crazy scheme, born of dad's desperation. It—it was for me. He wanted money to send me back east, to school. . . ."

Hat in hand, Pedro Guitterez, *mayor domo* of the JM spread for many years, approached the girl, a troubled look in his sun-scorched eyes. *"Con permiso, señorita mia,"* he said in dulcet Spanish. *"Pero—ahora qué?"*

She lifted her hands in a hopeless gesture. In those two final words Guitterez had encompassed the whole situation. "What now?"

Then Les Montfort began speaking rapidly in Spanish with the old man. At first Pedro seemed dubious, then finally began nodding his head with an affirmative, *"Si, si,"* but with little enthusiasm.

"But Les," cut in the girl, following the conversation. "You said yourself we couldn't get through. The Tejanos who have tried to make their way through the jayhawker country have failed. It's just plain suicide!"

"But everything is ready, Harmony," persisted Montfort. "Supplies and wagons. Pedro will go with us as far as the Colbert Ferry crossing of the Red River. It's only March. By mid-summer we can work north into Fort Scott, and by that time we can pick up men to help."

Finally, she agreed. The drive was on.

SLOWLY the cattle were drifted north, held under control and picking up weight. Ten, twelve miles a day they traveled. It was a straight herd; there were no cows to slow up the march by being unable to keep up with the long, ground-covering steps of the steers.

Early spring flowered into summer, drying creeks heralded autumn and chill northers finally told of approaching fall.

The drive was short of men, for despite the loyalty of Pedro Guitterez, he had been unable to hold the vaqueros. Renegade whites, drunk with four years of war and the might of gunpowder, "naturalized" Mexicans on sight with the Dragoon Colts that had served them so well during the conflict.

Other men had been picked up to take their places. But they, actuated by motives of their own, stayed with the herd until such a time as they tried to put their own ideas into effect—and learned the mettle of Les Montfort and Trent Carter.

It was hard work—fighting work. Yet, steadily, the herd was pushed northward.

At Fort Smith, in September, the first real trouble occurred.

Holding the herd outside of town, Les and Trent went into the conglomeration of saloons, gambling-houses and shacks that constituted the place. Despite their protests, Harmony Mason insisted upon accompanying them.

"Unless we can pick up four or five men here," Montfort announced, "We can't hold these cattle through the mountains."

He tightened the thong that tied down his old Walker model Colt, a gesture that did not escape Trent's eyes.

"We're in for it, Les," he said, his dark eyes shining, "but let's have at 'er. Harmony, you'd best wait for us over in the General Store. It's yore chance to get that calico you been wantin'."

Harmony knew that the Cosmopolitan Saloon toward which the boys were heading was no place for a woman. They left her in the store, in which a dozen other women were bargaining.

"An' don't leave till we come back, Harmony," warned Lee.

He didn't tell her why. It wasn't necessary. The streets were full of drunken men, and riders went through at the gallop.

The Tejanos met with little success in trying to enlist men to help with the drive. Work with cattle—Texas cattle at that? Hell, no! The railroad was paying good wages in Kansas. Besides that, what chance was there of getting through the Ozarks? Cantwell was operating out of Baxter Springs with the remnants of the Charley Hart gang, and half the people of that part of the country were working with him.

Then came the scream of a woman. Harmony! A pistol shot sounded. . . .

In half a dozen steps Les Montfort and Trent Carter made the street. They stopped where a slim young man of not more than twenty stood with a smoking revolver in his hand. At his feet a bearded, heavy-set individual was cursing roundly, holding his left shoulder with his right hand. Already a crowd was gathering.

"Harmony!" cried Les, as he gained her side. "Are you all right? What happened?"

"I came to the door to look for you," she stammered, "and he—"

"Are you-all kin to this gal, mister," asked the youngster with the gun. " 'cause if yuh ain't—"

"Yes, yes," said Harmony excitedly. "It's all right, they—"

"My name's Randy Jessup," said the youth. "This gent here was pesterin' yore womanfolk, an' when he laid han' on her, I figgered mebby I best step in till some of her own kin showed up."

He spoke with a soft Southern drawl, and seemed no more concerned about the man on the ground than as if he had shot a rabbit.

"Damn you!" the heavy-set one bellowed as he got to his feet, wincing with pain. "I'll get you for this or my name ain't Mike Stoddard! I'll tell Cantwell, an'—"

Randy Jessup stared at him with narrowed eyes. "Go on, mister," he said. But the other man stopped short, apparently realizing in his anger that he'd said something that he did not intend to. "You was jus' sayin' you'd see what Cantwell could do about it, wasn't you? Reckon I know who you are—Mike Stoddard uh Baxter Springs. You go back to Cantwell an' tell him the feller that shot you said his name was—Jessup. Or mebby you an' me better have a talk with the sheriff. If I'd knowed who you was, I wouldn't of been so careful."

But Stoddard seemed to have no intention of interviewing the sheriff. Likewise the name the youngster had given seemed to mean something to him, and he stumbled away, grumbling.

Somebody in the crowd shouted: "Them damn Tejanos, they's allus makin' trouble. Even the women—"

Les tried to locate the voice but failed. He turned to the young man. "I'm shore much obliged to you, Randy Jessup," he said slowly, "an' Miss Harmony, too. . . ."

But Randy Jessup seemed to be getting his thanks from the eyes of Miss Harmony herself. "Shucks," he said, a little ill at ease. "It was nothin' more'n scotchin' a snake, but—" and his brows went into a flat line—"if that's Mike Stoddard, this ain't the last of it. The Cantwell gang's got plenty friends hereabouts." Then he looked shrewdly at Les Montfort. "What you Tejanos doing up in this part of the country, anyhow?"

"We're taking a herd through to Sedalia," said Harmony, apparently not catching Montfort's warning glance.

Randy Jessup walked along with them until they were beyond hearing of the crowd. "That's bad," he said, pointedly. "With the jayhawkers on the rampage, and the Border Ruffians too. This man Cantwell is as bad as Quantrell hisself. He's playin' the Ruffians an' the jayhawkers against each other, an' usin' Texas Fever, for an excuse to—"

"We've come this far," interjected

Montfort, "we're not going to stop now."

"Reckon mebby I better go along with you then. I don't know Texas cattle much, but I can make a hand. I used to live up near Independence before the. . . ."

He stopped short, seeming to realize that he had been about to refer to an unpleasant subject. Texas had been rebel.

"But the war's over," said Harmony, sweetly.

Harmony Mason was wrong. The war fort the Tejanos of the JM spread was just beginning.

CHAPTER TWO

Into Enemy Range

THE addition of Randy Jessup to the group of Tejanos proved of incalculable help. Twice he worked the herd around through roads that were little more than mountain paths in order to avoid dangers that he seemed to sense, but which he never explained until the cattle were safe. Then he back-tracked Les and Trent, and watched bands of jayhawkers ride by—wolves of the cattle trail on the hunt.

Word had drifted ahead that another lot of Texas cattle was coming through, and the jayhawkers, using the excuse that had served them so long, were rousing the farmers of the countryside, demanding that the "invasion" be stopped. And the countryside, sensing more free beef, was ready to be aroused.

Once they hung on a ledge above the trail, almost within touching distance, as a band rode by them beyond Sulphur Springs. The men were a savage looking, unkempt lot, dressed in the tattered uniforms both blue and gray. Many a man explained his habiliments by the simple statement that he "needed 'em worse'n t'other feller," failing to explain that a bullet may have been the balance of power in the persuasion to change.

"Dog-gone 'em!" one of the men exclaimed angrily from the back of a horse standing knee-deep in the water of the creek, "'tain't nach'l them Tejanos slipped through here. Down on the White, they disappeared two whole days. Somebody that knows this country is a-hep'in' them—the damn traitor!"

Randy's lips tightened, but with the cattle already five miles beyond, neither Les nor Trent made comment.

But Luck, pressed too hard, cannot last always. Two days later in a narrow defile east of Turkey Ford, they found their path blocked by a dozen men whose bearded faces and ugly demeanor boded ill. By now, through loss and the misfortunes of the trail, the two thousand head with which they had left the brasada country had dwindled to twelve hundred.

Three times they had bribed their way through tight spots by contributing fifty or a hundred head. So far, force had not been necessary, for they had as yet met with no determined resistance.

"Who's in charge uh this hyah outfit?" demanded the rider who seemed to be the leader, a gangling, black-bearded Missourian slouched in an army saddle. "There ain't no damn furrin' cattle comin' into *this* county!"

Elbow to elbow the three men faced the crowd, a hundred yards ahead of the herd which was being held in check by Guitterez and two or three of the vaqueros he had been able to persuade to remain with the drive. He had as helpers, half a dozen boys Randy Jessup had picked up along the route. Neither the Mexicans nor the others could be depended on in any kind of a tight. Old Pedro would fight if necessary, but his help was not of much weight.

"Let me talk to him," whispered Randy to the others. "It's jus' possible we can give 'em a few cattle—"

"No," cut back Les stubbornly. "You've already given away five hundred head,

an' the time's come now when we're fightin'—not payin' tribute."

If there was any hidden significance in the statement, Randy chose to ignore it. True, he had advised such a course, rather than out and out defiance, but it had seemed best at the time.

He turned toward the leader of the mob. "Just what's yore proposition, mister," he queried, paying no attention to Montfort's protest. "These steers is all right. There's no fever in 'em. We're stayin' on the public road, an' no chance of yore stock gettin' infected. Of course, if we've got to cross yore land to get through, we might be willin' to pay...."

If the leader of the crowd had been the only one to deal with, the suggestion would have fallen on fertile ground. Apparently, however, the leader had overprimed his associates. A look of cupidity flashed into his eyes, only to die out immediately when he heard the others' angry protests.

"Yuh cain't bribe yore way through hyah with them steers," someone yelled.

The leader, sensing the temper of the others and anxious to remain in their good graces, quickly changed his tactics.

"These damned Tejanos got to be learned a lesson they'll remember!" he shouted. "For nigh onto a year now they been sendin' these mangy critters up here, diseasin' our stock, ruinin' our farms. If there ain't law to stop 'em, we'll do it! Bust up the herd, men!"

THAT was the war cry of the Missouri trail—"Bust up the herd!" The Tejanos had listened to too many stories of the jayhawker methods not to know what was coming. A cattle stampede, then another group would offer to help round them up again—for a price.

"Damn 'em!" whispered Trent Carter. "If they try it, feed 'em lead."

"Steady, Trent," ordered Les. "Gunplay won't help us here."

"They're not goin' to stampede this herd," gritted Carter. He raised his voice angrily. "The first man to make a move toward them steers, gets a slug in his belly!" He drew his six-shooter.

"Carter!" whispered Randy. "They're almost two to one; we can't—"

"You afraid, Randy?" Les snapped.

Randy Jessup sensed that Montfort did not quite trust him. He had done his best for these Tejanos, but now. . . .

Feeling secure in the fact that they outnumbered the Texas men almost two to one, the leader of the jayhawkers stepped forward. "You got five minutes to get that herd out of here," he shouted. "Take 'em back where they belong, south of the quarantine line!"

"I'm warnin' you—stand back!" said Trent Carter huskily.

"Trent!" whispered Harmony, "we're outnumbered; there's no use—oh, let's give up trying to get through before something awful happens. . . ."

Guitterez, dark and sullen, his loyalty to his beloved *patrón* of the JM hacienda urging him forward, came up and took Harmony's elbow. *"Por favor, señorita mia,"* he begged. *"Vamonos—"*

"Kill the damn Mex!" a jayhawker shouted. "He ain't no better'n a Tejano nohow. They're all the same spawnin'!"

Randy, sensing what was coming, moved, but not quickly enough. Somebody threw a stone. The girl, standing almost in front of Guitterez was in its line of flight. Realizing that it was too late to stop the man who hurled it, Randy did the next best thing. He shoved Harmony out of the way and the girl went to her knees. The stone struck Guitterez in the shoulder. Like a flash the Mexican sent his knife spinning. It lodged in the throat of the rock-thrower.

With an angry cry of "Kill the Tejanos! Kill the Tejanos!" the jayhawkers rode forward, their guns out.

The six gun in Trent's hand spat flame,

and one of the men in the van of the crowd dropped. The sight of the pair on the ground infuriated the others.

"Get Harmony back," whispered Les to Randy. "We're in for a fight."

But Pedro, who had bounced the girl upon his knee as a baby, had already started toward the rear, shielding her body with his own broad back. After Harmony was safe, Pedro came running back.

Then hell broke loose. Elbow to elbow the Texans stood, blocking the path that led to the cattle and Harmony. Six guns blazing, weaving back and forth to avoid shots of the infuriated jayhawkers, they refused to budge an inch.

The affair was over quickly. The jayhawkers broke and ran, thrown into a pandemonium of fear and confusion by the drovers' deadly fire.

"They're gone!" shouted Les Montfort. "They're gone and we—"

He stopped suddenly, sensing that where four of them had stood, there were now three. Trent Carter was down.

"I reckon one of them fellers knew how to shoot, Les," Trent said as he dragged himself painfully to one elbow. "They sort of . . ." He collapsed in a heap.

Harmony ran back to the wounded man, cradling him in her arms. "Oh, Trent! Trent!" she cried tightly.

Les Montfort was on his knees on the other side of the wounded man.

"I—reckon it's the—end of the trail," Trent gasped. He closed his eyes in a spasm of pain, then opened them. "Les you knowed I loved Harmony—but now it's too late to tell her. . . ."

Randy Jessup was standing near, his lean face lined with grief. The muscles of his throat moved convulsively as he heard Montfort's reply.

"We both did, Trent," Les said falteringly. "I'll look after her—always."

THEY buried Trent Carter beneath a mountain oak, marked the tree with a triple blaze and turned sadly away.

"Some day," Harmony Mason said through her tears, "we'll come back to this terrible country, Les, and see that Trent's grave is marked. . . ." Then she buried her head on Les Montfort's shoulder and cried out her grief.

Beside them, his fingers clenched into his palms, striving to show no emotion, stood Randy Jessup. He felt that he was a man apart, an outsider to this scene of sorrow, and yet within his heart burned something which neither Harmony nor Les would have understood.

Hastily, the drive was gotten under way. If friends of the jayhawkers who had fallen beneath the guns of the Tejanos felt impelled to seek revenge, there was no indication of that face. Things were almost too quiet.

The Texans and their cattle proceeded under the guidance of Randy Jessup without further hindrance. And if, during the next two or three days, Randy Jessup's mood seemed quiet, almost taciturn, it was put down to the influence of Trent Carter's death.

One night Harmony and Randy Jessup stood alone just outside the edge of light cast by the camp-fire.

"In another week, Miss Harmony," Randy said at last, "we'll be past Baxter Springs. The rest of the route is well marked, up the state line and then into Sedalia. I—reckon I'll be leavin' after yo're safe past the Springs."

"Leaving, Randy?" said Harmony softly. To her the knowledge seemed disconcerting. This lanky Missourian had grown very close in the past few weeks. Virtually making an outcast of himself in the midst of his own people, he had thrown his lot in with the Tejanos and guided them through enemy territory. Up to now Harmony hadn't even stopped to consider the reason for it. Now that she did, and realized its possibilities, a red flush stole into her suntanned cheeks.

"We'll miss you a lot, Randy, Les and I," said Harmony.

"I'll—miss you, too, Harmony," he replied not looking at her.

"I wanted you to stay with us until we reached Sedalia, Randy. You've really got an interest in the herd now, and when it's sold I intended to—"

He moved his foot nervously, toed a hummock of earth. "I wasn't thinkin' uh the pay, Miss Harmony. I just tried to help out because—well, jus' because —" He broke off awkwardly.

And Harmony Mason, whom the past weeks had turned from a girl to a woman, knew why. The full meaning of what his departure would entail, swept over her like a flood. "But—but you're entitled to it, Randy," she said, groping for something to cover up her confusion.

Randy looked her squarely in the eyes. "Take my share an'—buy a present when you—" He stopped, lamely, and then continued: "Les Montfort's a fine feller, Miss Harmony. I shore wish you both all the luck in the world!"

For a moment she was too stunned to answer. Then she realized that Randy had misinterpreted the statement made by Les beside the dying Trent Carter.

A wave of sympathy came upon her; sympathy for this man who had defended her in Fort Smith, and along the dangerous Ozark trails; a sympathy which was turning, before she realized it, into a stronger emotion.

"Les and I were raised together, Randy," she said softly. "I love him as I'd love my own brother, but—"

There are times when one word is more expressive than a thousand, and into that final word, Randy read much.

Somehow she found herself in his arms. The fire burned lower and lower.

With the cattle, Pedro Guitterez hummed an old Spanish love song:

Noche azul, querido,
Noche azul, y tu. . . .

"What's he singing'?" whispered Randy.

And Harmony, with her lips close to his ear, told him the words.

CHAPTER THREE

A Deal—In Blood

RIDING drag with Les Montfort the next day, Harmony was puzzled by his reticence, and finally asked him point blank what the trouble was.

"Nothin' much," he answered, glumly. "I reckon you an' Randy had a lot to talk about last night."

"I like Randy," she said. "Very much."

"Well, you shouldn't," cut back Les testily. "I don't trust him."

Harmony turned in her saddle. "Why Lester Montfort!" she protested. "How can you say that? If it weren't for Randy Jessup we'd never have gotten this far. He's the best friend we have!"

Tight-lipped he whipped at an overhanging brush with his quirt and watched the leaves scatter. "Yeah," he countered, "an' if it wasn't for him we'd still have five hundred head we ain't got. I tell you, Harmony, there's somethin' queer about that feller! Remember how he said to that man Stoddard in Fort Smith to tell Cantwell what 'Randy Jessup' said? Stoddard recognized Randy then. Cantwell's a outlaw. What truck has Jessup got with him? There's some tie-up between 'em, if you ask me."

Harmony's face flamed. "I didn't ask you, Les," she snapped, hotly, "and I think your suspicions unjustified. Randy's helped us through a country we never could have traveled alone. And if you're insinuating that he's dishonest or coupled with the jayhawkers and Border Ruffians—that's no way to talk about—the man I'm going to marry!"

Les Montfort froze in his saddle. "Harmony!" he stammered in disbelief, "You

don't mean you've gone an' fell in love with—with a Northerner?"

He uttered the last word as one might expectorate something unpleasant to the taste. Then: "You can't do it! You just can't. Yore father—"

She looked at him coolly. "My father's dead," she said slowly. "And I'm of age!"

Les Montfort could not trust himself to say more. He set spurs to his horse and galloped toward herd point.

Something had happened up ahead. Harmony reined out and rode forward.

A dark visaged, broad-shouldered man who wore a black broadcloth coat and had his gun belts crossed around his waist outside, came into sight.

Sensing another attack, Guitterez and his riders halted the cattle.

"Texas cattle, eh?" said the unknown as he slid out of his saddle and approached Jessup, who too, had dismounted. "What'll you take for a hundred head? My name's Henderson, I'm contractin' cattle for the new Kansas Pacific construction camps."

Harmony came nearer. Somehow the man's words failed to ring true. Yet she had to admit that she had no particular reason for disbelieving what he said.

"Dunno, mister," Randy said, eyeing the other. "Here's the boss. Mebby you can make a deal with her."

That anyone should even make a pretense of paying for her cattle seemed so strange to Harmony that for a moment she looked at the man carefully. Up to now there had been no question of pay. It had been either give—or have taken.

"We—we'd have to have cash," she said a little dubiously.

The man who called himself Henderson smiled broadly. "Why that's all right, little lady," he said. "I reckon the Kansas Pacific ought to have enough money to buy a hundred head."

Les Montfort stood quietly to one side, listening to the conversation.

"I don't think it'd be a good idea, Miss Harmony," said Randy quietly.

But from the glance sent in his direction by Montfort, it was apparent the Texan did not share his conclusion.

"Where's yore men," Randy cut in cautiously. "We got a sizeable drive of cattle, mister, and—"

The man who called himself Henderson stood feet apart, thumbs hooked into gun-belt. "Well, of course," he countered, "it's customary to deliver stock, and we'd want this beef at Baxter Springs."

"But—but we've heard that the jayhawkers are swarming around Baxter Springs, and—"

"Oh, that's all poppy-cock!" cut back the stranger. "The woods between here an' Baxter Springs is so full uh sojers you can't move without steppin' on 'em. Why, a outlaw wouldn't have a chance of savin' his skin 'twixt here and the Springs. Tell you what I'll do," he went on, digging into his coat for a fat wallet, "I'll pay twenty-five dollars a head for 'em, green-money!"

"I think you'd better take it, Harmony," said Les, turning to the girl.

"And I don't," snapped Randy. "Despite what this gent says, you know the trouble we've had already. We'd have to hold the herd here, split up the men an' send half of 'em over to Baxter Springs. If you take my advice, Harmony, we'll keep as far away from Baxter Springs as possible."

LES MONTFORT'S cheeks burned. If he had stopped to think, he would have known his feeling was nothing more nor less than jealousy, but he was in no reflective mood at that moment.

"If Harmony had taken less of yore advice, Jessup," Les cried angrily, "she might have more cattle today. We could of fought our way through a lot of those tights where you let 'em talk you out of

beef. Harmony'll be lucky if she gets to Sedalia with any cattle left."

Randy Jessup's temper flared, mirroring that of the other man's.

"Now, wait a minute," cut in Harmony. "I'll settle this."

Then to Henderson she said: "We'll accept your proposition, Mr. Henderson, on one condition. That is that you assume half the risk. If you are so sure there's no danger from jayhawkers and Ruffians between here and Baxter Springs, then pay us a thousand dollars and we'll deliver the steers to the Springs."

"Done!" ejaculated Henderson, slapping his thigh. "By golly, ma'am, I shore admire yore business spunk." Wetting a calloused, grimy thumb, he bent over his wallet, counting out the money.

"You stay here with the herd, Randy," ordered Les truculently. "I'll take Pedro and handle the steers."

Although Randy made no direct reply, it was plain he objected to Montfort's abrupt assumption of authority. Both of them looked toward the girl. Harmony was frowning uncertainly. It wasn't that she wanted to decide the question, but she felt that Les was being obdurate. If she could explain to him. . . .

"I think Randy better take the steers," she said, at last, and it hurt her more than she had thought it would to see Les Montfort's expression. "You're more used to the cattle, that's true, but Randy knows the country."

"Very well, then," said Les Montfort stiffly. "If that's the way you feel about it!" He swung his horse and galloped back to the herd, called Pedro and some of the men and began setting up a herd of one hundred head.

"Jus' you forget about them jayhawkers, ma'am," said Henderson, with a grin. "I'll bet they ain't goin' to bother you from now on."

Harmony wondered if there was any hidden significance to his remark, but said nothing, although it seemed that Randy immediately took it up.

"Bound to be a little outlawin', after such a long period of trouble," said Henderson, in conclusion.

"A little outlawin'!" Harmony shuddered. Hundreds of Tejanos killed for no other reason than that they were from Texas. Thousands of cattle stolen, confiscated by crooked quarantine officers.

She saw that Randy was looking straight at Henderson. He said slowly, "If anything happens to this girl and her herd while I'm gone, I'll take personal pleasure in huntin' down an' killin' every man that had anything to do with it!"

Henderson passed this off with a wave of his hand. Randy went to Les.

"I'm sorry you feel the way you do toward me, Les," said Randy flatly, as he faced the other. "I thought we could all be friends. But don't let anythin' happen to Harmony because of that. I love Harmony, Les, an' whatever I'm doin', it's because of her. Don't take any chances. I'll be back in three days."

If Les Montfort had any retort to make, he kept his own counsel.

Harmony and Les watched the cattle disappear around a bend in the trail. The girl hiding her misgivings in the realization that it was now too late to back out.

The day dragged into late afternoon. Harmony paced up and down the road. Travelers seldom used this road, she had been told, preferring to take another that was more direct. Their effort had been to slip the cattle through by using back roads, and not travel the highway where they would encounter many people. Strange, she thought, that Henderson should have taken this particular side road and found them. . . . Then abruptly she stiffened, listening intently.

Down the road she heard the galloping of horses and the rattle of sabers. Cavalry! Henderson had said the countryside was full of them.

The soldiers galloped into sight, a dozen men with a lieutenant at the head.

"Howdy, ma'am," said the officer, reining in and saluting as he saw her. "Seen any strangers hereabouts? We just came across from the other road by a short cut half a mile down this trail. Looking for a renegade named Cantwell, supposed to be in these parts."

It flashed into her mind that they had missed Randy and Henderson by taking the short-cut. Somehow, she felt relieved; why she could not tell.

"Nobody but—" she started to murmur, but the officer hadn't heard her, and she was glad he hadn't.

"Cantwell's a big man, wears his guns outside of a frock coat. Reckon you haven't seen him though, or there'd be evidence of it. He'd cut your throat in a minute to get those cattle."

Frock coat with guns outside—*Henderson!*

She tried to find words to form a reply, failed. If these men had missed the small herd, if Henderson was really Cantwell, then Randy. . . .

"Here's a picture of him and some of his gang, ma'am," said the cavalryman. There's a reward of $5000 for 'em—dead or alive!"

He raised his hand, spurred his horse and the detachment moved on.

Cantwell! She opened her mouth to call the soldiers, but no sound came forth. Les Montfort, attracted by the sound of horses, came out of the side canyon.

Henderson was Cantwell! She stared at the poster, her tongue clinging to the top of her mouth. Then she shut her eyes hard. But it wasn't a dream. For the man alongside of him in the picture was Randy!

CHAPTER FOUR

The Trail-Dust Traitor

"HARMONY," cried Les, running toward her. "What's wrong?"

She tried to hide the posters, to keep him from that damning knowledge which would confirm his suspicions. But he grabbed one from her hand, stared at it.

"Why—that's Randy, and the other one is. . . ."

He stared at her a long moment, moved by the grief he saw in her face.

"I'm sorry, Harmony. But maybe it's better to know it now than too late." He put his hand on her shoulder.

She looked at him with a quivering lip. "Maybe there's a mistake, maybe it isn't Randy," she said hopelessly.

Les shook his head. "Not a chance, I'm afraid. What fools we were. Hell, I thought Henderson acted as though he recognized him!"

For a moment he stood with furrowed brow, then exclaimed: "I've got it! Harmony, they're planning to raid the herd. Don't you see what they've done? By pretending to buy a hundred head they split our men. They figure they'll get the money back anyway, but once away from here, they'll turn the steers over to somebody else, butcher the men who went with them, return here and—"

"Poor Pedro," said the girl, sadly.

She didn't say one word about Randy Jessup. Les set his lips tightly. That one fact told him as much as anything that Harmony had determined to put Randy out of her mind forever.

"We've got to get going before they return with their gang," Les called as he went to round up the men. He explained to them what had happened and the necessity for moving on immediately.

"But we don't know this country, mister," complained one of the riders. "Randy Jessup knew every back road and turn. We'll just get lost in these hills, they'll get the cattle, and—"

"If you stay here you'll be slaughtered like sheep without a chance, you fools!" he shouted, whipping at their fears. "The jayhawkers will ride you down like rabbits!"

In his zeal to whip the men into action, Les overdid it. He succeeded so well in frightening them that the four remaining riders saddled their horses and disappeared. The three Mexicans who had stayed because of their loyalty to Pedro Guitterez were now without that oldster's courage to lead them on. They fled.

"We can do nothing, Les," said the girl, discouraged. "Better to keep the cattle in this draw where we can hold them by blocking the entrance."

"But they'll come back—they're bound to!" protested Les hotly, "I don't care for myself, Harmony, but you—if you should fall into the hands of those men!"

She slipped her hand inside her waist, drew out a tiny derringer that her father had given her. "I can use this," she said.

"Two bullets against those renegades," he countered. "They'd—"

"I'd need only one." His lips whitened as he realized what she meant.

"Then we'll leave the cattle," he snapped. "Don't you understand, Harmony, that I love you? I can't have anything happen to you. We'll hide; there'll be some way to escape."

They heard someone stumbling through the brush. "Look," shouted Montford, pointing. "Pedro!"

It was, in truth, Pedro Guitterez. Afoot, his clothes torn from his limbs by the brambles, bleeding from a dozen wounds, the old Mexican all but collapsed at their feet.

"Pedro!" cried the girl. "What happened?"

"Que lastima, señorita mia," he stammered, watching the throb of a wound in his arm that swelled and died down with every pulse. "Eet ees too bad. We are so few—they so many—there are *pistolas. Es fin*—the end. . . ."

"Randy?" she demanded, *"El señor extranjero. Que paso?* What happened?"

"Es un bravo," he answered, weakly. "Ver' brave, that *hombre*. He fights an' fights, alone. The others—*muerte*—" His eyes remained open in the fixed stare of death as he collapsed against a tree bole.

FROM down the road came the beat of many hoofs.

"Come, Harmony," ordered Montfort. "Quickly!"

Abandoning all thought of the cattle now, they plunged off into the thicket. Dusk was falling and into the shadow of the night they rode, stirrup to stirrup.

"We'd best cut around through the Osage country an' head for St. Louis, Harmony," Les suggested the next morning. "You've got enough money to take care of you until I can get a job."

There was a strange, staring look in her eyes as she answered. "We're not going to St. Louis, Les," she replied. "We're going to bury this money where we can find it again, and we're going to be paid for our cattle."

He looked at her in amazement. "Are you mad, Harmony? We'll be lucky to get out of this country alive! The cattle are gone. . . ."

She was fumbling at her waist where she had placed one of the notices.

"For information leading to the identification, arrest, and conviction of any of the above men, the United States government will pay the sum of five thousand dollars—dead or alive," she read slowly. "Randy Jessup owes us that, Les, and he's going to pay it. We're going to Baxter Springs."

For a moment Les Montfort was too dumfounded to say anything. Then: "But we'd be spotted for Tejanos instantly, Harmony. We'll be despised for that fact alone, if for no other!"

"Look," she said, pointing at some scare-crows in a cornfield. "As long as we don't talk, as long as we're not dressed differently from those about us—who can tell we're Tejanos?"

They took the scare-crows' rags, hid

their saddles, buried most of the money in a hollow tree where it could be found again and turned their horses loose. On foot they started for Baxter Springs.

Over and over again Les Montfort protested Harmony's course. He seemed unable to reconcile the hatred that had sprung to life in this girl's breast with anything he remembered about the girl he had been raised with.

"You said you loved me, Les," she said a little bitterly. "I've always been fond of you as a sister loves a brother, yet I'll marry you—after Randy Jessup has been made to pay!"

And no amount of persuasion would swerve her from her determination.

THE town of Baxter Springs, Missouri, was little different from a dozen other settlements that had sprung up during the Fifties along the border-line of outposts that followed the Missouri River to Independence, thence south along the Kansas border. The streets were muddy and dusty by turns, saloons and gambling houses flourished on all sides. Discharged soldiers from the army mingled with bull-whackers and teamsters westward bound.

Dressed as a man, Harmony's presence occasioned no comment. If there was talking to be done, Les Montfort did it. Yet no amount of talking would dissuade Harmony from her course.

"But what can you do, Harmony?" he persisted. "Even the soldiers haven't been able to run down Cantwell and his men. After the Lawrence raid, the government put all their resources into the field to try and capture Quantrell. Quantrell was shot later, but Cantwell escaped. The people in this section are still hostile toward Grant, they'll do everything they can to help the outlaws, not because they are outlaws but because the government's trying to catch them."

"And that's why they're not caught, Les," she argued. "The troopers move in detachments and the jangle of their sabers can be heard for miles. The renegades simply stand aside until they pass, and go on with their raids."

They were crowded up against a building as a troop of cavalry rode by. Those who stood to one side and watched, looked at the horsemen with a sullen expression. To them, the soldiers represented constituted authority. Most of these men had been under the thumb of authority for four years—now they resented it, hated what it stood for.

"Look," she whispered, pointing. "It's the same officer who came into our camp looking for Cantwell and—" She caught her breath, went rigid.

"There's Randy Jessup in front of that saloon," she whispered breathlessly. "He's grown a beard, but I'd know him!"

She had the reward notice clenched tightly in her hand as she broke from Les Montfort's restraining hand and dashed across the street, calling: "Lieutenant! Lieutenant!"

People turned curiously to what seemed to be a man with a girl's voice.

The officer halted his men, swung in his saddle.

Randy spun on his heel. He too had recognized her voice. "Harmony!" he cried, as she came toward him.

"Arrest that man," she called to the officer, pointing at Randy. "He's one of the Cantwell gang. This reward notice will prove it. He—he stole my cattle—"

She stopped short. Somehow her moment of triumph seemed flat, unsatisfying.

In the eyes of Randy, surrounded now by half a dozen soldiers, she read disbelief, disappointment and scorn.

CHAPTER FIVE

Raiders of the Lawless Border

IF THERE had been any doubt in the mind of the cavalry officer concerning the identity of Randy Jessup, Har-

(Continued on page 122)

IN THE SADDLE

A MAN would travel many a mile up the lonely trail before he'd meet anyone like Smoke O'Hay—boss of the Muleshoe spread, who, in the words of Aunt Kate Conners, "would likely turn up at his own weddin' with a shiner just like the one my own Matt—rest his soul—had at his!" For Smoke O'Hay loved fighting more than food or liquor, and more than either one he loved fair play.

Perhaps that was the reason why his own outfit would follow him to hell's back-log any time they got the chance, and also why—to all but a few red-blooded men and women in Old Fort Benton—he was branded outcast. None of which greately bothered Smoke O'Hay—until that long wagon train arrived one sunset from the Mormon country, and for the first time he saw Martha White. . . .

It was like that hot-headed young Texas cattleman to ask Martha White to the big dance given that evening by the officers at the fort. Yet within five minutes of his magnificent invitation, he'd gotten into a fight and told the girl that, for her own good, she had better not go with him!

Perhaps no one knew what the girl's look of scorn did to that hot-blooded young cattleman. Smiling, he bowed himself away from her door, and stepped at once into more trouble than the average cowman would see for fifty years. His herd was a drug on the market when he finished paying off for some of the things which his pride refused to let him accept; he was a wanted man, hunted for a murder he never committed. And then he heard that Martha White was, after all, going to the dance, with his arch-enemy, Captain Dawson. . . .

Not even the chance that he would be captured and hanged could keep him away!

There was a commotion at the front of the dance hall. A military figure was barking orders.

"Don Juan of the cavalry—Dawson himself!" grinned Smoke. He took Martha suddenly in his arms, and holding her close, kissed her fiercely on the mouth. Then as the grease-smeared, red-blanketed officer sighted him and barked a hoarse order to the soldiers around him, Smoke let the girl go. He made a flying leap through the window.

And, landing, on his feet outside, he almost collided with Buck, his foreman.

"Move the herd to the KC range, Buck," Smoke snapped. "I'm heading north. Lead Dawson and his blue-bellied Yanks up to the Canadian line if you want to, an' swap 'em to the red-coated Mounties for rye whiskey. I've sold the Muleshoe outfit to Aunt Kate!"

He swung into the saddle without touching the stirrups.

That's just the start of one of the most dramatic stories that Walt Coburn has yet given us—an authentic saga of the old Montana country, during the lawless days when an honest man had to carry on a running fight against a back-shooting bunch of sure-thing gunmen. It's set against a panorama of the open ranges and the thundering stampeding herds. . . .

Then there'll be more stories of the old frontier, by Cliff Farrell, Ray Nafziger, Harry F. Olmsted, John G. Pearsol and others. The November issue is published October 1st!

don't Worry about Rupture

Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry and fear? Learn now about this perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire—you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy life's normal activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting Fear of Rupture banished from your thoughts! Literally *thousands* of rupture sufferers *have* entered this *Kingdom of Paradise Regained.* Why not you? Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where others fail is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, *do not despair.* The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support

Gives Nature a Chance to CLOSE the OPENING

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that permits Nature to close the opening—that holds the rupture securely but gently, day and night, at work and play! Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for results beyond the expectation of the writers. What is this invention—How does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Automatic Air Cushion Appliance—send now for *free* Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy this remarkable, LOW-PRICED rupture invention! But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust or corrode. It brings heavenly comfort and security—while the Automatic Air Cushion continually works, in its own, unique way, *to help Nature get results!* Learn what this patented invention can mean to you—send coupon quick!

PROOF!

Read These Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases.

(In our files at Marshall, Michigan, we have over 31,000 grateful letters which have come to us entirely unsolicited and without any sort of payment.)

Likes Brooks Best

"I bought one of your Rupture Appliances in 1933, wore it day and night for one year and laid it aside last December. The rupture hasn't bothered me since. I used several others without success until I got a Brooks."—J. B. McCarter, Route 2, Box 104, Oregon City, Ore.

"Runs and Plays"

"My son has not worn the Appliance for over a year. He wore one for ten years and I am very grateful now to think he has laid it aside. He is twelve years old, runs and plays hard like all boys and is never bothered about the rupture."—Mrs. M. George, Route 1, Box 103, Cumberland, Md.

C. E. BROOKS, Inventor

SENT ON TRIAL!

No. . . . don't order a Brooks now—FIRST get the complete, revealing explanation of this world-famous rupture invention. THEN decide whether you want the comfort—the freedom from fear and worry—the security—the same amazing results thousands of men, women and children have reported. They found our invention the answer to their prayers! Why can't you? And you risk nothing as the complete appliance is SENT ON TRIAL. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this no-risk trial. Send for the facts now—today—hurry! All correspondence strictly confidential.

FREE! Latest Rupture Book Explains All!

Sent You in Plain Envelope. **Just Clip and Send Coupon ➡**

Brooks Appliance Co., 173K State St., Marshall, Mich.

Mail This Coupon NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
173-K State St., Marshall, Mich.

Without obligation, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER—all in plain envelope.

*Name*_____

*Street*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

State whether for Man____ Woman____ or Child____

"I have REDUCED MY WAIST 8 INCHES WITH THE WEIL BELT!"
...writes George Bailey

Wear the WEIL BELT for 10 days at our expense!

YOU will appear many inches slimmer at once and in 10 days if your waist line is not 3 inches smaller it will cost you nothing. "I reduced 8 inches" . . . writes Geo. Bailey. "Lost 50 lbs.," writes W. T. Anderson. Hundreds of similar letters.

If you do not
REDUCE Your WAIST 3 INCHES in 10 DAYS
. . . it will cost you nothing!
NO DIET, DRUGS OR EXERCISES

You will be completely comfortable as the massage-like action and gentle pressure of your Weil Belt persistently eliminate fat with every move! Gives an erect, athletic carriage . . . supports abdominal walls . . . keeps digestive organs in place . . . and with loss of fat come increased pep and vigor.

Fat endangers your health. Insurance Companies know the danger of fat accumulations. So don't wait any longer . . . act TODAY!

SEND FOR 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

THE WEIL COMPANY, INC., 4010 HILL ST., NEW HAVEN, CONN.
Gentlemen: Send me FREE, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and full details of your 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER.
Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

Here's a Queer Way to *Learn* Music!

BE YOUR own music teacher. Just a simple, easy, home-study method. Takes only a few minutes—averages only a few cents—a day. No "grind" or hard work. Every step is clear as crystal—simple as A-B-C throughout. You'll be surprised at your own rapid progress. From the start you are learning real *tunes* by note. Learn to play "jazz" or classical selections—right at home in your spare time.

Free Book and Demonstration Lesson

Don't be a wallflower. Send for Free Booklet and Free Demonstration lesson. These explain our wonderful home study method fully and show you how easily and quickly you can learn to play at little expense. Mention your favorite instrument. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. Write NOW.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
3671B Brunswick Bldg., New York City

Pick Your Instrument

Piano	Guitar
Violin	Saxophone
Organ	Mandolin
Cornet	Ukulele
Trombone	Harp
Piccolo	Clarinet
Flute	'Cello
Hawaiian Steel Guitar	
Trumpet	
Piano Accordion	
Italian and German Accordion	
Voice and Speech Culture	
Harmony and Composition	
Drums and Traps	
Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor)	

(Continued from page 119)

mony's story quickly removed it. To the accusations of Harmony and Les Montfort, Randy made no reply. Asked to explain the attack upon the cattle, he said nothing.

He made but one request—to speak to Les Montfort, alone.

"There's no time to lose, Montfort," he said crisply, "get Harmony out of here quickly. Oh, I know what you think of me—but let that pass. There's not even time to explain."

They had bound his hands behind his back with buckskin, but had not removed the guns that hung on his thighs.

"I don't reckon Harmony'll want to go," said Montfort icily. "There's a five thousand dollar reward for yore capture, an' Harmony thinks she's entitled to that much for the loss of her cattle."

Jessup looked at the other man with a queer expression.

"She—did that—?" he said, huskily. Then his lips tightened as he added: "Her cattle weren't stolen. You ran away—abandoned them. But there's no time for explanations now. Get Harmony out of here, if you love her!"

From down the street came a chorus of rebel yells, the shrill, chilling *yip-yip* of the guerillas. Then the pounding of hoofs, the crash of firearms. Doors were slammed shut; people scurried for safety.

"Cantwell's raiding the town!" was the cry that went up.

Randy worked himself free of his bonds. No one seemed to be paying much attention to him. The soldiers were seeking shelter, getting carbines into action.

Stunned by the sudden development, Harmony stood speechless.

While Randy and Les had talked, the soldiers had thrown themselves into the shelter of some packing cases filled with goods, stacked on the sidewalk awaiting shipment. Les, Harmony and Randy Jessup were twenty feet from shelter as the renegades swept around the corner,

horses at a dead run, firing right and left as they came down the single street.

"Nice work, Randy," yelled Cantwell, at the head of the gang. "Get a horse. If that's the Mason girl, bring her along!"

Harmony Mason's face flamed. "You—you renegade!" she spat. "I—I could kill you myself! You traitor!"

The bandits were turning now to come back through the town, firing as they galloped. The soldiers had discharged one volley, but they were hampered by their own protection. In order to use their guns effectively they had to come from behind, and the firing of the renegades had been deadly.

"For God's sake, Harmony!" cried Randy agonizedly. "They're coming back! Les, get her to cover!"

"She's right, Jessup," cried the Texan angrily. "You deserve killin'. A man who would profess to love a girl, an' then—"

Whirling their mounts at the end of the street, the bandits were returning now at full gallop, firing right and left.

"Oh, you fool!" yelled Randy as Les Montfort drew his gun. "Can't you see—"

His hard fist traveled less than six inches, yet its force lifted Montfort clear of the ground and sent him back against the wall, unconscious.

"Take care of him, Harmony," he shouted, "and keep clear."

He drew his guns. The renegades were almost upon them now.

"Fire at will," shouted Randy Jessup. He planted himself squarely in the street, sixguns blazing—but he was firing at the renegades!

The troopers swung their rifles toward the oncoming horsemen, dropping several.

Randy was holding his fire now. Astride a big bay horse, Cantwell jerked the animal to a squatting halt, swung off and came toward Randy.

"You damn Yankee double-crosser!" he shouted, hoarsely. "I'll settle with you now! You sold us out—for that girl."

(Continued on page 124)

FACTORY TO YOU

NEW REMINGTON *NOISELESS* PORTABLE!

10¢ A DAY

Money Back Guarantee
10-Day Free Trial Offer

AT LAST! The famous Remington Noiseless Portable that speaks in a whisper is available for only 10¢ a day. Here is your opportunity to get a real Remington Noiseless Portable direct from the factory. Equipped with all attachments that make for complete writing equipment. Standard keyboard. Automatic ribbon reverse. Variable line spacer and all the conveniences of the finest portable ever built. PLUS the NOISELESS feature. Act now while this special opportunity holds good. Send coupon TODAY for details.

YOU DON'T RISK A PENNY

We send you the Remington Noiseless Portable direct from the factory with 10 days FREE trial. If you are not satisfied, send it back. WE PAY ALL SHIPPING CHARGES.

● FREE TYPING COURSE

With your new Remington Noiseless Portable we will send you—absolutely FREE—a 19-page course in typing. It teaches the Touch System, used by all expert typists. It is simply written and completely illustrated. Instructions are as simple as A, B, C. Even a child can easily understand this method. A little study and the average person, child or adult, becomes fascinated. Follow this course during the 10-Day Trial Period we give you with your typewriter and you will wonder why you ever took the trouble to write letters by hand.

● FREE CARRYING CASE

Also under this new Purchase Plan we will send you FREE with every Remington Noiseless Portable a special carrying case sturdily built of 3-ply wood. This handsome case is covered with heavy du Pont fabric. The top is removed by one motion, leaving the machine firmly attached to the base. This rugged case easy to use your Remington anywhere—on knees, in chairs, on trains. Don't delay . . . send in the coupon for complete details!

SEND COUPON WHILE LOW PRICES HOLD

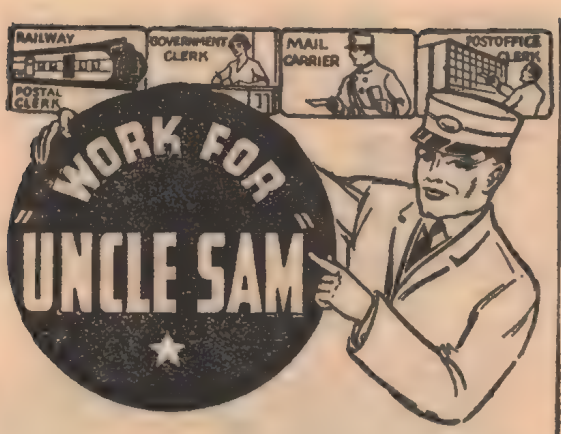
Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 123-10
315 Fourth Ave., New York, N. Y.

Please tell me how I can get a new Remington Noiseless Portable typewriter, plus FREE Typing Course and carrying case, for only 10c a day. Also send me new illustrated catalogue.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____



START

$1260 to $2100 YEAR

MEN—WOMEN

Get ready immediately

Common education usually sufficient.

Mail Coupon today sure.

Hurry.

COUPON

Franklin Institute
Dept. G174
Rochester, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Rush to me, FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay jobs obtainable. Send FREE 32-page book describing salaries, vacations, hours, work, etc. Tell me how to get one of these jobs.

Name.....

Address.....

BALD? Hair or No Pay!

Use SCALPOLENE for Dandruff, excessive falling hair, Itching Scalp and Baldness. Absolutely guaranteed. NO HAIR—NO PAY. Large outfit, $3.00. Particulars free.

RELIABLE SPECIALTY CORP.
1500 Lafayette Ave. Buffalo, N. Y.

WHAT DOES YOUR FUTURE HOLD FOR YOU?
Let Me Tell You FREE

Would you like to know without cost, what the stars indicate your future will be; whether you will be successful, prosperous and happy; about business, love, money, marriage ties, friends, enemies, travels, sickness, lucky and unlucky periods; what pitfalls to avoid; what opportunities to grasp, new undertakings and other information of untold value to you? Here is your chance to obtain an Astrological Interpretation.

GODFREY SPENCER
Noted Astrologer

FREE Your Astral reading will come to you at once from this great Astrologer whose predictions have excited the interests of two Continents. Let him tell you FREE startling facts that may change the whole course of your life and bring success, happiness and prosperity. Simply write your name and address, plainly, give date of your birth and send 25c to cover postal expenses. Don't delay. Write Now, to SPENCER STUDIOS, Suite PP-1, 160 FIFTH AVENUE, N. Y.

NOTE: Godfrey Spencer is held in high esteem by his many influential and important clients. He has predicted the election and reelection of President Roosevelt, Edward's Abdication, Mussolini's victory in Ethiopia, the Spanish Revolution, the Assassination of the present Head in Russia. The Floods in America and the present Union Strikes.

(Continued from page 123)

Randy had held one shot. He pulled the trigger, and the gun missed fire.

Half a dozen soldiers' rifles swung on Cantwell.

"Hold your fire men," cried Randy. "Cantwell must hang!"

"I'll never hang, damn you," yelled Cantwell, as the gun in his hand bucked and flame lanced from the muzzle.

"You'll hang, Cantwell!" choked Randy Jessup as he went to his knees in the road. "You'll hang, and I'll—"

"Randy!"

The cry, shrill and full of agony, came from Harmony. It was followed almost instantly by the sharp crack of a derringer. Cantwell cursed as the bullet struck his wrist and he tried to shift his gun to his left hand.

Fingers that had been ready to press triggers eased their deadly pressure as two of the troopers flung themselves upon the outlaw, pinioned his arms.

"Captain Jessup, are you bad hurt?" cried the lieutenant who had commanded the men at the other end of the store building. "We got them all—and Cantwell's alive to hang!"

But Captain Randall Jessup, U. S. A., was out. What he didn't know was that Harmony Mason had laid aside the derringer that brought Cantwell down and was trying to find something to stop the flow of blood in his shoulder.

Later that night, three people stood near the corrals on the edge of Baxter Springs where a thousand Texas longhorns stomped nervously.

"If you and Les had just waited!" said Randy, his arm in a sling. "The Army Intelligence department doesn't permit explanations, Harmony. I was assigned by the President himself to break up these border gangs, and for six months I rode with Cantwell until I knew every man of his outfit. I was checking up on others when I met up with your drive in

(Concluded on page 126)

Steady Work

As nearly all manufacturing and building starts on the drafting table, the draftsman is one of the first to be hired, last to be laid off. His blueprints, his specifications, give the final word in what the workmen are to do

Good Pay

The draftsman has been called the Junior Engineer, which accurately describes his work, position and pay. He combines knowledge of principles, mechanism and construction details with ability to draw plans and indicate methods. Usually his salary is considerably above the wages of the mechanic and, of course, less than that of the engineer.

Become a Draftsman

Enjoy a Real Job in Industry

Chance for Promotion

Helping design new buildings, machines or construction methods, the draftsman knows what his firm is planning or considering. It may be the superintendent—engineer—even the prospective buyer with whom he consults. These contacts, plus his experience, place him in an excellent position for promotion when next there is a good opening.

2 Drafting Lessons Free

Test Yourself! See how readily you can learn Drafting by interesting, practical home study. Write TODAY for facts and 2 beginning lessons FREE.

A Job Where You Are Not Old at 40

Athletes, farmers, factory and shop workers—all who rely on muscle often are old at 40. Office workers—executives, teachers, professional men, *draftsmen*—just approach their prime at 40 to 50. Training increases your value AT ONCE and *continues* to help boost your earning power as you mature.

Train Now for 40 and the Years Between!

Even if you are now only 18, 25 or 30, you should *look ahead* -begin training TODAY for the job you want at 50. Training helps you to be independent—self-supporting. It helps you to enjoy associations denied to untrained men. Training helps you to offer your family advantages far in excess of what you could give them as an untrained man. Investigate NOW.

American School, Dept. DD-749, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

BIG Free BOOK ON CRIME CASES

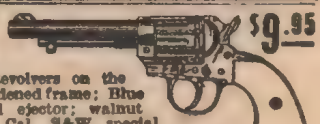
Fascinating book on Scientifically solved true crime cases sent absolutely free to those over 17. Also tells how to get into Scientific Crime Detection. Home Study. New opportunities. Travel. Steady Employment. Experience not necessary. Very easy terms.

SCIENTIFIC CRIME DETECTION INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.
C & O Bldg., I. Y. Baristo, Pres., Dept. 9K7 Huntington, West Virginia

---

"TEXAS RANGER"

6-Shot Double Action



$9.95

One of the most popular Revolvers on the market. Heavy solid case-hardened frame; Blue steel 5½" barrel; side rod ejector; walnut stocks. Chambered for 38 Cal. S&W special ctgs.—$9.95. White ivoroid stocks—$10.95. Holsters, open, 95c; Shoulder, $1.75; Cartridges—$1.50 per 50. Automatics: 10 Shot 25 & 32 Cal.—$8.95; 32 cal. 8 shot—$7.85. $2 Deposit required on C.O.D.'s—send M.O. in full and save charges. None sold to minors. *New Fall Bargain Catalog: S&W, Colts, Rifles, Holsters, Air Guns, Telescopes, etc. Send 3c Stamp.*

LEE SALES CO. (Dept. DG) 35 West 32nd St., N. Y. City

MAKE MORE MONEY

Taking Orders For The NIMROD Line

Earn more every day in the year representing old established firm with a complete line of fast selling necessities: Shirts, Neckwear, Underwear, Dresses, Hosiery, Raincoats, Overcoats, Leather Jackets, Show Suits, Pants, Breeches, Coveralls, Shop Coats, Uniforms, Campus Coats, etc. Every item guaranteed. Experience unnecessary. Write quick for FREE SALES EQUIPMENT.

NIMROD CO., Dept. 190
4922-28 Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

This Beautiful Lifelike

PHOTO RING

NEWEST SENSATION! Send any snapshot or photo and we'll reproduce it in this beautiful onyx-like ring. Indestructible! Waterproof! Enclose strip of paper for ring size. Pay postman plus a few cents postage. If you send 48c we pay postage. Canadian orders send cash!

SEND NO MONEY

48c

(Hand-painted 25c extra)

REX PHOTO RING CO.
Dept. P1, Southern Ohio Bank Bldg. Cincinnati, Ohio

RUPTURE

no matter of how long standing or of what size, is promptly and permanently overcome by our Specialists and without dependence upon trusses. *You will be able to throw away your truss permanently* if treated by our Specialists at the Invalids Hotel. Write for free booklet.

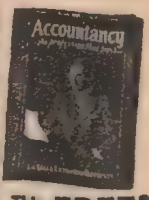
DR. PIERCE'S CLINIC, Dept. K, Buffalo, N.Y.

BIG PROFITS! AMAZING NEW BUSINESS

MEN WANTED FOR STORE ROUTES
Handle Nationally Advertised line Drug Sundries Toilet Goods, Cosmetics, Novelties, Notions—including Laymon's Aspirin—Tested and Approved by Good Housekeeping Bureau. All sold from Self-Help Counter Displays. Merchants make DOUBLE Profits. You make up to 112%. No investment to start. Facts Free. WORLD'S PRODUCTS CORPORATION, Dept. 10034, Cincinnati, Indiana.

Home Study

Accountancy Training



Accountants who know their work command responsible positions and good incomes. And the need for trained accountants is growing. About 16,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. and many thousands more executive accountants. Many earn $2,000 to $15,000. We train you thoroughly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is personally given by staff of C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write for valuable free 64-page book describing opportunities in accounting field and telling how you may enter it successfully.

This Book **FREE!**

LASALLE EXTENSION
Dept. 10334-H Chicago

Learn Radio in 12 WEEKS

I WILL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING

IF YOU ARE SHORT OF MONEY

Prepare for jobs in Radio Broadcast, Talking Pictures, Television by 12 weeks of practical shop work in the great Coyne Radio Shops, on real RADIO and Sound equipment. You don't need advanced education or experience. Free Employment Service for life. Many earn while learning. Electric Refrigeration—Air Conditioning included. MAIL COUPON TODAY for free book which tells you how hundreds have become successful Radio Men after taking our training.

H. C. LEWIS, Pres., COYNE ELECTRICAL & RADIO SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 77-8H, Chicago, Illinois

Send Free Radio Book and facts. Tell me about your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan.

NAME _____ AGE _____
ADDRESS _____
TOWN _____ STATE _____

TYPEWRITER ½ Price

Easy Terms
Only 10c a Day

Save over ½ on all standard office models. Also portables at reduced prices.

SEND NO MONEY

All late models completely refinished like brand new. FULLY GUARANTEED. Big free catalog shows actual machines in full colors. Lowest prices. Send at once.

10c a Day Trial

SPECIAL PORTABLE BARGAINS —

Brand New FEATHERWEIGHT Model Portable—up-to-date improvements and features now offered at sensational low price. Fully Guaranteed. 10 Day Trial. Free course in typing included.

International Typewriter Exch., 231 W. Monroe St. Dept. 1030, Chicago

FREE BOOK

RAISE GIANT FROGS

Husbands—Wives! Get into this new side-line! WE BUY Other markets waiting. Start near your home with a small pond. Free frog book. American Frog Canning Co. (185-T) New Orleans, La.

FALSE TEETH

60 DAYS TRIAL

I have thousands of satisfied customers all over the country who could not afford to pay big prices. I have been making dental plates for many years, by mail. I guarantee you satisfaction or they do not cost you one cent, and I take your word. Teeth made especially for you personally can be tried for sixty days. In one Pennsylvania town alone, 91 people are wearing teeth made by me. They are satisfied and saved money.

SEND NO MONEY

My plates are very beautiful to look at and are constructed to give life-long service and satisfaction. You can look younger at once. They are made with pearly white genuine porcelain teeth. Well fitting and guaranteed unbreakable. Remember you do not send one cent—just your name and address, and we send free impression material and full detailed directions. Be sure to write today for my low prices and complete information. Don't put this off. Do it today.

FREE

DR. S. B. HEININGER, D. D. S.

440 W. Huron St., Dept. 1072, Chicago, Illinois

(Concluded from page 124)

Fort Smith. You nearly upset the apple-cart when you had me placed under arrest. There were too many of Cantwell's men in town for me to explain things to the officer in charge. Fortunately I was recognized by a man who was in my company during the war."

"But Pedro," she said, with a touch of sadness in her voice. "He said—"

"Cantwell's plan was to split your men, get the hundred cattle and come back when the main herd was practically unprotected. But Harmon's Ruffians wanted those cattle, too. It was the Harmon gang that attacked us and killed Pedro and the others. I got away from Cantwell, gathered up some men who were friendly, went back to get the rest of the herd—and found you and Les had disappeared. "Well," he grinned, "there they are—all ready to go to Sedalia tomorrow!"

"I guess I'll have to admit bein' wrong, Randy," said Les, slowly. "And Harmony, I'll take back what I said about Randy bein' a damned Northerner—that is, if I can come see you sometimes."

Randy gripped the Tejano's fingers with his free hand. "And I'm sorry about that punch in the jaw, Les. I had to do it though; you wouldn't listen."

The other smiled a little ruefully. "Reckon I'd better have a look at them steers. . . ."

He walked away, knowing that the excuse was a lame one, but sure that his absence would be appreciated.

Minutes ticked by, and neither Randy nor Harmony seemed to notice the moonlight as a tiny sliver of moon crept up over the Missouri hills.

Harmony whispered softly in Spanish:

Noche azul, querido,
Noche azul, y tu. . . .

"Blue night, darling," he whispered, "Blue night, and you. . . ."

"Randy, you, remembered. . . . ?"

"I'll always remember, *querida,*" he said quietly.

THE END

There are now thirty-odd magazines on newsstands made up of reprint stories. These magazines give no sign that their stories are second hand: that readers have read them in other magazines a few years ago.

* * *

Presenting old stories in the guise of new ones is a policy of certain publishers.

The reason is—USED stories in the reprint market can be bought by publishers for one-tenth to one-fifteenth of the price that DIME WESTERN MAGAZINE, for example, pays for NEW stories.

* * *

All stories in DIME WESTERN MAGAZINE and all other magazines issued by Popular Publications are NEW stories.

FOLLOW THIS MAN

Secret Service Operator No. 38 is on the job! Running down dangerous Counterfeit Gang. Tell-tale finger prints in murdered girl's room.

Free *The Confidential Report Operator No. 38 made to his chief. Write for it.*

Earn a Regular Monthly Salary

YOU can become a Finger Print Expert at home, in your spare time, at small cost. Write for our Special 1st report and details. Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave.,
Dept. 7387 Chicago, Ill.

SELL WHOLESALERS, RETAILERS..SELL EVERYBODY

Razor Blades. Double Edge. 100 Blades..	$ .27	Lotions and Creams Special. Dozen....	$ .54
Shaving and Dental Cream. Special, Gr.	4.75	Shoe Laces. 27 in. Black. Paired. Boxed. Gross	.35
7 Cake Wonder Soap Assortment. Box...	.10	Army & Navy Needle Books. Gross.....	1.15
Perfume, Face Powder & Necklace Combination. Dozen Sets Complete..	.96	Vanilla Extract. Good Quality. 16 oz. Doz.	.84

Deposit with All C. O. D. Orders. 1000's of Other Big Values. POLICY: "Only One Shipping Point for Low Overhead and Lowest Prices. We Sell The World Over." Buys of a Lifetime.

UNIVERSAL WHOLESALERS, 901 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Free For Asthma

If you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma at this season of the year; if you choke and gasp for breath don't fail to send at once for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live nor what your age or occupation nor whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Write now and test the method free on your own case. Address:

Frontier Asthma Co. 382-B Frontier Bldg.,
462 Niagara Street Buffalo, N. Y.

WE MATCH PANTS

To Any Suit!

Double the life of your coat and vest with correctly matched pants. 100,000 patterns. Every pair hand tailored to your measure. Our match sent FREE for your O. K. before pants are made. Fit guaranteed. Send piece of cloth or vest today.

SUPERIOR MATCH PANTS COMPANY
300 S. State St. Dept. 534, Chicago

Kidneys Must Clean Out Acids

The only way your body can clean out Acids and poisonous wastes from your blood is through 9 million tiny, delicate Kidney tubes or filters, but beware of cheap, drastic, irritating drugs. If functional Kidney or Bladder disorders make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Backache, Circles Under Eyes, Dizziness, Rheumatic Pains, Acidity, Burning, Smarting or Itching, don't take chances. Get the Doctor's guaranteed prescription called Cystex (Siss-Tex). Works fast, safe and sure. In 48 hours it must bring new vitality, and is guaranteed to do the work in one week or money back on return of empty package. Cystex costs only 3c a dose at druggists and the guarantee protects you.

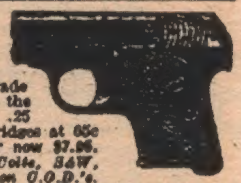
WARTS REMOVED WITH CASTOR OIL PREPARATION

Say goodbye to ugly warts. A new liquid NOXACORN gets rid of them in few days. Also dries up pesky corns and callouses. Contains 6 ingredients including pure castor oil, "corn-aspirin", iodine. Absolutely safe. Approved by Good Housekeeping. Easy directions in package. 35c bottle at druggists. Money back if it fails to remove any wart, corn or callus. Try it.

NOXACORN

"VEST POCKET"

$7.95 NEW EDITION **$7.95**



The smoothest, hardest shooting high grade 7 shot .25 caliber Auto. pistol on the market at half price. Also 10 shot .25 caliber. Shoots standard 25 Colt cartridges at 65c box. Leather holster 60c each. Order now $7.95. *Write for Catalog of Guns, Rifles, Colts, S&W, Binoculars, etc. $2 Deposit required on C.O.D.'s.*

HUDSON SPORTING GOODS CO., A-52 Warren Street New York

MAKE MONEY with your CAMERA

Thousands of publications buy MILLIONS of photos yearly from amateurs. We show you what to photograph, how to do it, where to sell for biggest profits. Learn at home to become a journalistic or press photographer. Pay for course in easy installments. Use any camera. Write for FREE BOOK.

FREE BOOK

UNIVERSAL PHOTOGRAPHERS, Inc., Dept. 3710, 10 West 33rd Street, New York, N. Y.

DRAFTING

Brings $ $ $ $ $ To You!

I'll train you at home on Practical Work to get experience and until in Position. I furnish all tools and drawing table. Earn your way while you learn in spare time. No previous experience needed. Successful since 1900. Write for Free Book.

ENGINEER DOBE
Div. 3347 LIBERTYVILLE, ILL.

LEARN AT HOME FROM AN ENGINEER!

YOU CAN HAVE LUCK

Are you unlucky in Games, Love, Money, or Business? You can get a pair of Genuine "MYSTIC KARMA" highly magnetic LIVE lodestones. These strange, amazing, rare curios Draw, Compel, Attract. Live Lodestones are a favorite with occult Oriental people who carry them as a

POWERFUL LUCKY CHARM

one to attract good luck, draw money, hold good fortune, love, happiness, prosperity—the other to prevent bad luck, misfortune, dispel evil and distress. Absolutely Guaranteed Live or your money back. Dressed by our own special process. Order today. SEND NO MONEY. On delivery, pay postman only $1.98 plus 12c postage for the two with VALUABLE DIRECTIONS and information FREE. You can be lucky. Order NOW.

MECCA CO., Dept. J, 567 Fifth Ave., N. Y. C.

START DRAWING BIG MONEY

Learn to Draw at Home
Practical-Pleasant-Profitable!

Commercial Art offers a real opportunity to men and women of all ages. Our simple, individualized method of teaching Commercial Art, Cartooning, Designing is actually fun! Write for FREE BOOK—"Art for Pleasure and Profit." State age.

Studio 9118A Washington School of Art
1115-15th St. N. W., Washington, D. C.

$100 FOR 8 HRS.

D. P. Harris, Mt. Car., received $100 for painting done in 8 to 8 hrs.

EARNED $325

In one month. Now operating own business. —J. M. OOS-TERLA., Kans.

this FREE BOOK tells you how

CATARRH SINUS HEADACHES

Due to nasal congestion

Relief or Money-back. Hawking, stuffed-up nose, bad breath, caused by nasal catarrh. Your Druggist has **Hall's Catarrh Medicine.** Write today for Free Treatment Chart and Money-back offer.

F. J. CHENEY & CO. • Dept. A-10 • TOLEDO, O.

$1 STARTS YOU IN BUSINESS selling **TIES**

Leading manufacturer offers amazing values! Latest Glove and Muffler, Tie and Handkerchief, Hose and Tie Sets. Patented Slyde-On Ties. Genuine Leather Ties. Complete line of newest Fall neckwear priced from $1. to $9. dozen. Also shirts, hosiery. Many fast-selling novelties! Make over 100% profit. Send today for Wholesale Catalog of 42 Money Makers and FREE Sample Swatches.

NEW! Silk Muffler Tie & Kerchief Set to Match Sample Set 99¢ $10.20 Doz.

FREE SAMPLES Boulevard Cravats, 22 W. 21st St., Dept. M-50, New York

BIG CASH TAKING EASY ORDERS

Sell Shirts with the Starchless Collars that are neat, comfortable and hold their shape. Ties, Hose, Underwear, too. All guaranteed 1 year. Biggest selection, newest styles. All sizes. Low Prices. Big Cash Commissions. Cash Bonuses regularly. Sales Outfit FREE. Write TODAY.

QUAKER SHIRT CORP.

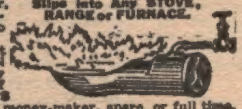
Dept. PO11, Broadway at 31st St., New York

NEW TYPE CHEAP OIL BURNER

WHY COOK OR HEAT With COAL or WOOD

Quick heat at turn of valve—hotter, cheaper, no dirt, ashes or drudgery. Burns cheap oil new way—no clogging up or carbon.

Slips into Any STOVE, RANGE or FURNACE.



SENT ON TRIAL Prove it cuts fuel bills, pays for itself quickly by what it saves at our risk. Offer of

FREE SAMPLE TO AGENTS Wonderful money-maker, spare or full time. Write quick—a postal card will do. Address

UNITED FACTORIES, M-762 Factory Building, Kansas City, Mo.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied — Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dpt. H-740 Drexel at 58th, Chicago

WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS, SONGS

For Immediate Consideration Send Poems to COLUMBIAN MUSIC PUBLISHERS, LTD., Dept. 14, TORONTO, CAN.

WANTED - MEN

to cast Christmas goods, 5 and 10c Novelties, Toy Autos, Ashtrays, etc. Can be done in any spare room and no experience necessary. A rare opportunity to devote spare or full time to profitable work. Apply only if over 21.

METAL CAST PRODUCTS CO. Dept. T

1696 Boston Road New York, N. Y.

Learn PHOTOGRAPHY at Home

Splendid opportunities. Prepare in spare time. Easy plan. No previous experience needed, common school education sufficient. Send for free booklet "Opportunities in Photography", particulars and requirements.

American School of Photography

3601 Michigan Ave., Dept. 1417, Chicago, Ill.

GAMBLERS SECRETS EXPOSED

Cards 4 new ways to read 'em. Xray-Costhru know 1st, 2nd and 3rd without taking card off top. Dice Missers Passers. Systems. Quit losing. Races, Stock Market. Send $1 for new book "BEAT THE CHEAT." Invisible card ink. Slot Machine. Punchboard exposes. Send $1 to Johnson Exposes, Box 2488-P, Kansas City, Mo.

ASTHMA Treatment mailed on FREE TRIAL. If satisfied, send $1; if not, it's Free. Write for treatment today.

W. K. STERLINE, 610 Ohio Ave., SIDNEY, OHIO

Classified Advertising

Photo Finishing

ROLLS DEVELOPED—Two Beautiful Double Weight Professional Enlargements, 8 Neverfade Prints, 25c. Century Photo Service, LaCrosse, Wis.

Help Wanted—Instruction

FOREST JOBS AVAILABLE $125-175 MONTH. Cabin, hunt, trap, patrol. Qualify immediately. Write Rayson Service, C-62, Denver, Colo.

$105-$175 month. Get a Government Job. List jobs FREE. Write today. Franklin Institute, Dept. G-37, Rochester, N. Y.

Advertisers

This space is available for legitimate advertisers who are looking for profits at low cost. Write for rates to: Department F, Popular Publications, 205 East 42nd Street, New York.

Poem—Songwriters

Songwriters: Interesting Proposition. Write: PARAMOUNT SONG-RECORDING STUDIO, L-14, Box 190, Hollywood, Calif.

SONG POEMS WANTED—any subject. Send best poem today for offer. RICHARD BROS., 30 Woods Bldg., Chicago.

SONGWRITERS: Send for Free Rhyming Dictionary and Writers' Guide. MMM Publishers, 636 Studio Bldg., Portland, Ore.

SONG POEMS WANTED TO BE SET TO MUSIC. Free examination. Send poems to McNeil, Bachelor of Music, 4153 A South Van Ness, Los Angeles, Calif.

Patent Attorneys

PATENTS. Low Cost. Book and advice free. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 573, Washington, D. C.

Female Help Wanted

Position open for married women to wear and show sample dresses. Earn to $16 weekly spare time. No canvassing. No investment or experience required. Fashion Frocks, Dept. BE-1026, Cincinnati, O.

Patents

INVENTORS—Write for New Free Book, "Patent Guide for the Inventor" and "Record of Invention" form. No charge for preliminary information. Clarence A. O'Brien and Hyman Berman, Registered Patent Attorneys, 16-F Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

Education and Instruction

BLUE-PRINT Reading taught by mail. Write Blueprint Reading Institute, Box 5662, Metropolitan Sta., Los Angeles.

Old Money Wanted

$5.00 to $2500.00 each paid for rare coins. Send 15c for new 28 page complete buying book. American Coin Company, Box 3507-T, Cleveland, Ohio.

Salesmen Wanted

EARN FREE SUITS AND CASH PROFITS. Earn Cash Profits PRIZES and FREE SUIT for selling FIVE tailored-to-measure suits. No limit on Free Suits you may earn. No experience necessary. FREE SAMPLE OUTFIT. Prices from $18.50. Money back guarantee. FRANK KNIGHT TAILORING CO., 330 S. Franklin, Dept. P-10, Chicago, Illinois.

"Give Me Your Measure and I'll Prove in the First 7 Days You Can Have a Body Like Mine!"

No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED make such an offer!

I'LL give you PROOF in 7 days that I can turn you, too, into a man of might and muscle. Just think of it! Right in the first week under my guidance you will see and feel the improvement! Then as my weekly instructions arrive in your home you continue to re-build, renew and "overhaul" your body. By the end of three months you are the owner of a powerful body that you will be proud to display anywhere, anytime! People will notice the ruddy glow of health in your face, the sparkle in your clear eyes, your broad shoulders and they will seek your company. You will be the fellow who will walk off with the prettiest girl and the best job while others wonder how you did it!

Write your name and address carefully on the coupon below. I'll send you absolutely free a copy of my new book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."* It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who twice won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" against all comers! And it shows how I can build you into an "Atlas Champion" the same way.

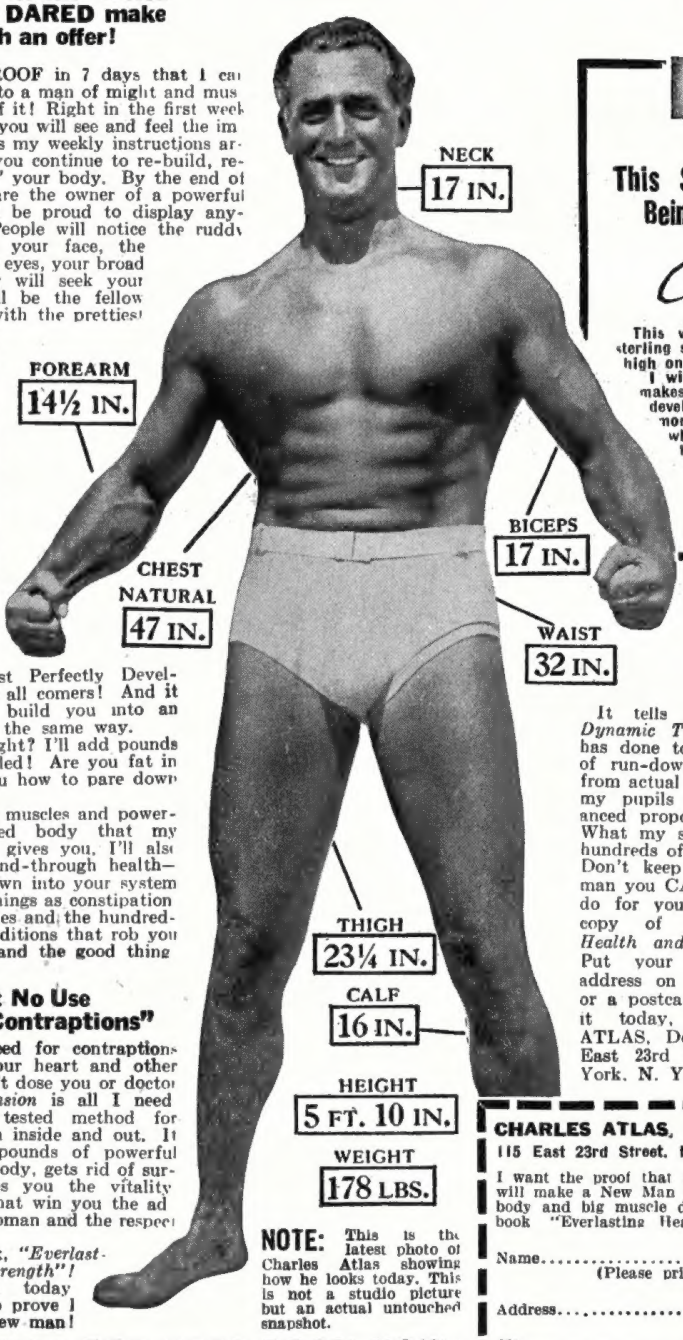
Are you underweight? I'll add pounds where they are needed! Are you fat in spots? I'll show you how to pare down to fighting trim.

And with the big muscles and powerful evenly-developed body that my method so quickly gives you, I'll also give you through-and-through health—health that digs down into your system and banishes such things as constipation pimples, skin blotches and the hundred-and-one similar conditions that rob you of the good times and the good things of life.

I've Got No Use At all for "Contraptions"

I haven't any need for contraptions that may strain your heart and other vital organs. I don't dose you or doctor you. *Dynamic Tension* is all I need. It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

Get my free book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength"!* Mail my coupon today. Gamble a stamp to prove I can make YOU a new man!



NOTE: This is the latest photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.

This Sterling Silver Cup Being Given Away by

Charles Atlas

This valuable cup, made of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base. I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement on his development within the next three months. Therefore, no matter what your measurements may be now, you have an equal chance to win this cup for permanent possession — and with YOUR name engraved on it!

Get my free book by mailing coupon below.

48-PAGE BOOK FREE

It tells you all about my special *Dynamic Tension* method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique. What my system did for me and these hundreds of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only half of the man you CAN be! Find out what I can do for you. Where shall I send your copy of *"Everlasting Health and Strength"?* Put your name and address on the coupon, or a postcard, and mail it today. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept 83Z, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83Z.
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

City..... State.....

England — 40-42 Chandos Street, London, W C. 2

MAIL COUPON FOR FREE BOOK NOW!

SPRINGBOARD ACE. Jane Fauntz Manske says: "When I smoke Camels at mealtimes and after, I find that my digestion runs more smoothly." The best meal digests easier when you smoke Camels.

THREE-TIME OLYMPIC WINNER in the high dive. Dorothy Poynton Hill says: "I prefer Camels because they don't get on my nerves. And, like so many other women, I like Camel's flavor."

WHAT SOME OF AMERICA'S AQUATIC STARS SAY ABOUT SMOKING...

(*Left*) **LENORE KIGHT WINGARD.** She has broken 7 World's Records—16 Nat'l Records—in speed swimming. Lenore comments on smoking: "Camels are certainly mild. They never jangle my nerves."

MISS GLORIA WHEEDEN says: "I always think of smoking Camels and eating as going together."

(*Right*) **HAROLD "DUTCH" SMITH,** who holds Olympic diving championships, says: "I've found great pleasure in Camels. I long ago found Camels restore my energy after a strenuous meet."

(*Left*) **PETE DESJARDINS** — internationally famous diver—speaking: "Divers like a *mild* cigarette that doesn't upset nerves. That's why I prefer Camels."

MILLIONS MORE FOR COSTLIER TOBACCOS!

Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS — Turkish and Domestic — than any other popular brand

Copyright, 1937, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Winston-Salem, N. C.

FOR DIGESTION'S SAKE — SMOKE CAMELS